

Meeting of:	Democratic Services Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 22 July 2019
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	Written Response by the Welsh Government to the Report of the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee entitled Diversity in Local Government - April 2019
Purpose of Report:	To apprise Members of the Minister for Housing and Local Government response to the Welsh Assembly Equality, Local Government and Communities Committees recommendations in relation to Diversity in Local Government
Report Owner:	Head of Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	Jeff Rees
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	This is an internal matter and, therefore, no consultation has been necessary.
Policy Framework:	The Council will be required to abide with any changes required as a result of any new statutory legislation.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On Wednesday 26 June, the National Assembly for Wales debated the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee (ELGCC) report on Diversity in Local Government. The Committee made 22 recommendations in its report which were predominantly for the Welsh Government. These ranged from publicity campaigns to encourage greater diversity of candidates standing for election, to mock elections for young people to run concurrently with Assembly elections. Some of the Committee's recommendations would require new and additional resources from the Welsh Government. Set out at Appendix A, is a copy of the Minister's response to the Committee's recommendations. 	

Recommendation

1. That the recommendations of the Welsh Assembly Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's recommendations in relation to Diversity in Local Government and the Minister's response be noted.

Reason for Recommendation

1. To apprise Members.

1. Background

- 1.1 On Wednesday 26 June, the National Assembly for Wales debated the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee (ELGCC) report on [Diversity in Local Government](#). The Committee undertook the inquiry in anticipation of the proposed local government bill, to suggest practical solutions to overcome some of the many barriers preventing greater diversity in local government. The results of the Councillors' survey can be found on this link.
- 1.2 In 2014, a report by an expert group established by the Welsh Government – [On Balance: Diversifying Democracy in Local Government in Wales](#), found that the profile of Councillors is still predominantly white, male, and with an average age of about 60. The report authors noted at the time that it is “vital that the people which make decisions on our behalf are in tune with and representative of their local communities”.
- 1.2.1 Welsh Government (WG) has considered that the changing the makeup of our democratic institutions, making them more diverse and representative, has not progressed as rapidly as many would have hoped. Despite some early successes in Wales, such as equal gender representation at the National Assembly in 2003, similar progress has not been seen within Council Chambers across Wales. At present, women account for around 28 per cent of elected Local Authority Members – in 2004, the figure was 22 per cent. And despite some progress in the number of female Local Authority Leaders, of Wales’ 22 Local Authorities, only four are led by women.
- 1.2.2 Female under-representation in local government forms only part of the challenges ahead. Increasing representation among younger people, individuals from BAME and the LGBT community, individuals with disabilities and those from different socio-economic backgrounds presents significant challenges for local government as a whole across Wales. Activities to encourage participation in local government do exist, such as mentoring and leadership schemes (some informal, as in the case of the Council). These provide opportunities for individuals in under-represented groups to build confidence and develop skills for public life. Nevertheless, evidence heard by the Committee shows that such schemes have not always had the anticipated impact on diversity.
- 1.2.3 Members of this Council were sent details of how to participate in the WG Committee's evidence gathering exercise via email on 6th July last year, with the deadline for responses to WG before 24th August, 2018.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** The Committee made 22 recommendations in its report (set out in the Minister's response at Appendix A), which were predominantly for the WG. These ranged from publicity campaigns to encourage greater diversity of candidates standing for election, to mock elections for young people to run concurrently with Assembly elections. Some of the Committee's recommendations would require new and additional resources from the WG. However, as a matter of urgency, the Committee were of the view that the WG should establish an Access to Elected Office fund in Wales. While the Committee did not specify how much resource should be allocated, the fund would assist individuals with disabilities to run for office. The fund could also be extended to assist individuals from other under-represented groups in Wales.
- 2.2** In addition to the above, the Committee made a number of recommendations in relation to aspects of the administration of local government business. These include relaxing restrictions on Members' remote attendance at formal Council meetings, and expanding opportunities for job-sharing at Cabinet level. The Committee also called for the collective reporting of care allowances for dependents claimed by Members – anecdotal evidence suggests some Members are deterred from claiming the allowance for fear of public criticism.
- 2.3** The Committee also considered that social media presented Elected Members with a platform to engage and communicate with the electorate in a way that was not previously possible. However, the Committee also took the view that it also provided a platform for sharing abuse and harassment. The Committee called for stronger guidance for candidates and elected representatives on what is, and isn't, acceptable behaviour on social media. Further to this, the Committee recommends a review of the robustness of support mechanisms for members experiencing online abuse and harassment whilst carrying out their public duties.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** Evidently these proposals are for the WG to introduce through its legislative programme in due course. However, the Council acknowledges its role in contributing to these important matters and the commitment to diversity is reflected in its Corporate Plan. One of the Council's Wellbeing Outcome and related objective has identified Valuing Culture and Diversity so that citizens have opportunities to achieve their full potential including, respecting and valuing diversity within our communities and recognises the importance of promoting equality of opportunity.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** These are still to be determined. As stated in the Committee's report implementation of some its recommendation will require new and additional resources to be provided by the WG.

Employment

- 4.2** The main implications will likely to be officer time.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** The Council is required to comply with statutory provisions as set out in the relevant sections of the Employment Rights Act 1996; the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002; the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011; the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended); the Equality Act 2010

5. Background Papers:

None.

Julie James AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Housing and Local Government



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref: MA-P/JJ/1834/19

John Griffiths AM / AC
Chair, Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee
National Assembly for Wales

23 May 2019

Dear John

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee entitled Diversity in Local Government - April 2019

Thank you to the Committee for their valuable work in this important area of Diversity in Local Government. The Committee's consideration of the oral and written evidence presented before them has produced a helpful report and recommendations.

The Welsh Government is committed to increasing diversity within elected office and enabling individuals who wish to stand for election within their communities to do so

Your report focusses on a number of important issues, including remote attendance, job-share arrangements and support to assist disabled individuals to run for elected office. These are areas where work is already underway, but there are always further steps which can be taken to improve opportunities for individuals.

In addition to the areas highlighted in the report, we should acknowledge that measures have already been taken to support diversity. Wales was the first in the UK to make legislative provision for family absence for elected members to address some of the barriers to participation in local government for councillors who may have family responsibilities. We intend to update these arrangements in the Local Government and Elections Bill.

The evaluation of our Diversity in Democracy Programme will inform the next phase of this project, which I will be able to say more about later this year. It will be important, as part of that work to be clear about how we can pull together research from a range of projects / reports - including your recent report - to identify areas for action.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

As part of this work we will want to be clear about which issues are common to individuals participating at different levels of local government i.e. town, community and principal councils and where issues are specific to a particular level.

We will also want to be clear about what steps can be taken to assist individuals across the broader spectrum of protected characteristics.

We want to work with stakeholders and partners to ensure a collaborative approach which achieves further progress in this area.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie James".

Julie James AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Housing and Local Government

Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government, in its forthcoming local government bill, includes provisions to relax the restrictions on members' remote attendance and voting at formal council meetings set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to enable local authorities to trial the use of video communication methods.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government is committed to providing local authorities with greater freedom to make arrangements to support individuals who, due to a range of circumstances, are not able to contribute fully to discussion and decision making in person at formal council meetings.

We have previously indicated that provisions will be introduced in the forthcoming Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill to amend the remote attendance sections in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to simplify their use.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government works with the Welsh Local Government Association to identify three local authority areas to trial the use of video communication methods to facilitate participation by remote attendance at council meetings.

Response: Accept

Change is often an iterative process and it is important that lessons are learned about what works well, what works less well and how challenges are overcome. The Welsh Government welcomes the opportunity to work with the Welsh Local Government Association and local authorities to identify a number of areas to trial new approaches. Once these pathfinders are identified we will work in partnership with stakeholders to identify whether there are any further steps which the Welsh Government can take to address barriers to progress.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government promotes expanding job sharing opportunities between two individuals for executive members of local authorities, as has been undertaken successfully in Swansea Council.

Response: Accept

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government explore the feasibility of enabling job sharing between two individuals for non-executive members of local authorities and include provisions to enable this in its forthcoming local government bill.

Response: Accept in Principle

Response to Recommendations 3 and 4

The Welsh Government recognises the clear benefits job sharing arrangements can bring to facilitating greater opportunities for individuals to increase diversity in democracy. The key to success in this area is being clear about how the arrangements operate to maximise the benefits of this approach for both the local authority and the individual job sharers.

There are two distinct issues, the first of which is job sharing arrangements for members post election. Job sharing for executive members will enable greater diversity in leadership positions in local authorities and the forthcoming Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill will therefore include provisions to facilitate job sharing arrangements for members of council executives and leaders. We will also consider what arrangements could be put in place to facilitate job sharing in non executive member roles such as committee chairs.

On the separate issue of job sharing arrangements for non executive members on election. This is not an issue upon which we have consulted the public and it has wide ranging implications for how electors are represented and their relationship with those representatives. There is not sufficient time to explore and research this prior to the introduction of the Local Government and Elections Bill later this year. We will, however, consider this issue as a part of the next phase of our Diversity in Democracy programme.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs associated with considering the separate issue of job sharing on election will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government evaluates the work being done by the Welsh Local Government Association to raise awareness among public sector organisations of the benefits of employees undertaking civic duties. Should such an evaluation prove that this work is successful, consideration should be given to how it could be rolled out to private sector businesses.

Response: Accept

It is important that organisations not only recognise the value in supporting individuals to participate in civic duties but that they demonstrate this by removing barriers to participation. For example where possible by enabling individuals to undertake activities within the work environment. This will be increasingly important as part of an approach to maximise remote attendance at meetings. We welcome the work of the Welsh Local Government Association in this area and will work with them to consider how we might take this work forward.

The potential benefits to personal growth and development for individuals who are elected are significant and often have a positive influence and impact on individuals outside of their council roles.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association start work on a positive campaign to increase diversity among candidates standing for local government elections by summer 2019.

Response: Accept

As part of taking forward the Welsh Government Programme, Diversity in Democracy, we will be working with partners to identify the scope and components of a campaign to increase diversity among candidates standing for local government elections. For a campaign to be effective it will require all partners to work together.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government updates its statutory guidance on training and development to specify that support for members on maintaining a positive work / life balance should be included in the induction programme.

Response: Accept

It is vital that elected members receive support in their roles, especially when they are newly elected. The role individuals undertake during their term(s) of office will also have an impact on the level of training, awareness and support they require. There is already a considerable amount of support offered to elected members by a range of organisations. It will be important, going forward, to ensure these opportunities compliment each other and focus on, not only the knowledge and skills required for the role but importantly support individuals to recognise and manage this with the important aspects of life outside of their elected member role. The Welsh Government will work with local government and the WLGA to identify improvements which can be made to the current statutory guidance.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government makes it clear to local authorities that members should not be required to publish their home addresses on the authority's website.

Response: Accept

As part of our consultation *Electoral Reform in local government in Wales* in 2017, the Welsh Government sought views on removing the need for candidates in local government elections in Wales to publish their home addresses. We intend to make legislative provision to remove the requirement to publish addresses (local government and Assembly elections). We will also make legislative provision to require local authorities to publish the official address of its elected members rather than their home address.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government, in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association and the Electoral Commission, urgently addresses deficiencies in guidance for elected representatives, candidates and prospective candidates on what does and does not constitute acceptable behaviour on social media.

Response: Accept

There are already several pieces of guidance available in this area but we will discuss with the WLGA and the Electoral Commission what more might be done in this area. In addition, the Welsh Government supports the principles set out in the UK Government's consultation Protecting the Debate: Intimidation, Influence and Information to consider the creation of a new electoral offence in relation to intimidation, providing clarity around the issue of undue influence and requiring digital footprints to be assigned to campaign materials.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government and local authorities review the robustness of support mechanisms for members experiencing online abuse, harassment or bullying and implement changes to strengthen this support.

Response: Accept

The evidence to the Committee acknowledged the guidance issued by the Welsh Local Government Association about this important matter which is of significant concern to both prospective and existing members. Following the recommendation by the Committee for Standards in Public Life, the National Police Chiefs' Council, the Electoral Commission, the College of Policing and the Crown Prosecution Service have jointly developed guidance about behaviour which candidates in elections may experience during a campaign which is likely to constitute a criminal offence.

The Welsh Government is happy to work with local authorities and the Welsh Local Government Association to consider what additional measures are required to support individual members.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that:

We condemn the action of social media companies in dealing with online abuse and recommend that the Welsh Government presses the UK Government to ensure strong and robust legislation to tackle social media abuse.

Response – Accept

Good, robust and respectful debate must be a part of our democracy and ensuring a healthy debate which encourages free exchange of views is a fundamental aspect of how solutions to issues are progressed. However this exchange should not be mistaken for an opportunity for individuals to abuse those who hold different and sometimes opposing view. This is not acceptable and the Welsh Government will take whatever steps it can to stand against this behaviour and support those who choose to undertake, not only local council roles, but all individuals who choose to participate in public life. We will write to the UK Government on this matter and raise it in our regular discussions with UK Ministers on electoral matters.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government seeks to ensure consistency in the implementation of local authorities' codes on conduct by issuing guidance on their enforcement.

Response : Accept in Principle

The Local Elections (Declaration of Acceptance of Office) (Wales) Order made under the Local Government Act 1972 sets out a framework to promote consistent standards of appropriate conduct in local government. Under the Act, a person must give a written undertaking to observe their authority's code of conduct before they may act as a member. The undertaking forms part of the statutory declaration of acceptance of office.

The functions of a local authority's standards committee are to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and to assist members to observe their authority's code of conduct. More specifically, a standards committee is required to monitor the operation of the authority's code and to provide advice and training for members on the code. Training on the code of conduct forms part of induction training for newly elected members and ongoing training programmes for returning members. Monitoring officers provide day-to-day support to standards committees and advice to members on the code of conduct.

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales has issued statutory guidance to assist members (and monitoring officers) in understanding their obligations under the code. The Ombudsman also publishes examples of actual cases of alleged breaches of the code considered by his office, in the 'Code of Conduct Casebook'.

The Welsh Government supports the underlying intention of Recommendation 12 in seeking to promote high standards of conduct. Building on the existing standards framework, the Local Government and Elections Bill will include provision requiring leaders of political groups to promote high standards of conduct within their groups, working with and supported by an authority's standards committee. The Bill will also require standards committees to publish an annual report on standards of conduct within their authority and this must include how group leaders have complied with their duties under the legislative provisions set out above. Councils will be required to consider the report and any recommendations, thereby ensuring that members collectively consider standards of conduct within an authority at regular intervals.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs associated with bringing forward provisions within the Bill will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government encourage local authorities to adopt a consistent approach to reporting on the cost of care allowance claimed by councillors, by reporting this on a collective basis per allowance rather than detailing each allowance claimed by individual members.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government is concerned that individuals choosing to represent individual communities are electing not to claim for reimbursement of expenses which assist them in undertaking their role. The purpose of introducing the cost of care allowance was to enable individuals to make arrangements for family members to be cared for while they undertook activities to support their communities. While not against the approach proposed it will be important to discuss this approach with the Information Commissioner to establish their view. It is also important that local authorities challenge, where possible, the view that members should not be entitled to this kind of support. Everyone has a duty to promote the value of elected members and the contribution they make on behalf of society and it must be

recognised that without this type of support many would not be able to consider standing for elected office.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government requires local authorities to collect information on the number of current councillors eligible to claim the care allowance and how many do so.

Response: Reject

It is important that local authorities make every effort to ensure individuals understand what support they are entitled to. However, in order to establish whether individuals are eligible to make claims, local authorities would require each elected member to identify how they met the criteria, even in cases where the member had no intention to make a claim. There is a balance to be struck here between encouraging individuals to apply and respecting an individual's preferences for their personal arrangements.

The Welsh Government will ask the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales to consider this matter further.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs associated with the request for the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales to consider this matter will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government commissions a review of all publicly funded mentoring programmes to assess their effectiveness, including value for money

Response: Accept in Principle

There have already been evaluations of several mentoring schemes, including the Welsh Government's Diversity in Democracy scheme. There are undoubtedly lessons to be learned from these evaluations and they will be considered as we move forward with the next phase of the Diversity in Democracy programme.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs associated with considering lessons learned through the Diversity in Democracy programme will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government, following an evaluation of publicly funded programmes, looks at the possibility of establishing a national leadership programme, building on the experience of Chwarae Teg Women's Equality Network and others to encourage more people from under-represented groups standing for election

Response: Accept

The possibility of a national leadership programme will be considered as one of the options to take forward the next phase of Diversity in Democracy programme.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that:

In the forthcoming local government bill, the Welsh Government includes provisions to roll out an adequate level of political education across schools in Wales. Young people from the ages of 14 and 15 should receive this education, particularly should proposals to extend voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds be implemented. This programme of political awareness should be accompanied by clear lesson plans to empower teachers to deliver the lessons.

Response: Accept in Principle

While we do not intend to legislate specifically to include provision for political education in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill; we are working with stakeholders and partners to introduce educational material for those who are newly enfranchised along with communication strategies to raise awareness in preparation for National Assembly elections in 2021 and the local government elections in 2022. This will include development of resources for schools to use with their learners. There are a number of opportunities in the current curriculum to support this, including via the 'Active Citizenship' theme in the existing PSE framework, one of the challenges within the Welsh Baccalaureate framework. In the new curriculum, there will be opportunities to include this area in the Humanities Area of Learning.

In both cases the primary focus for schools is to prepare 16 and 17 year olds to vote. This material will include information on the democratic structures and franchises in Wales, the importance of taking part in democracy as well as information on how to register to vote.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs associated with the work set out in the paragraphs above will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that:

The recommendation made by ERS Cymru that a national mock election for young people which should be held at the same time as Assembly elections. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers how this can be implemented.

Response: Reject

The Welsh Government welcomes the idea of individuals participating in mock elections to support learning around the democratic process. There are already a range of activities being undertaken across Wales to support young people to understand the importance of elections to them as individuals and the communities they live in. These activities include elections to the National Assembly's Youth Parliament where the election leads to representation and debate on the issues which affect young people in Wales showing young people how their vote has made a difference in the longer term. As we move forward with extending the franchise in devolved Welsh elections these existing activities will be coordinated, harnessed and supplemented through a Welsh Government led stakeholder group. They will be combined with the education and awareness raising work we will be supporting schools to undertake. We believe this continuous and wide ranging work aimed at capturing all of our young people will have a greater impact than a one off event.

Financial Implications – None. There will be no costs associated with the mock trials as this recommendation is rejected. For costs associated with education materials see financial paragraph at recommendation 17.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that:

As a matter of priority, the Welsh Government establishes an Access to Elected Office fund in Wales to assist disabled individuals run for elected office. The possibility of extending such a fund to support other under-represented groups should also be explored.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government is committed to introducing a scheme in Wales, which will be taken forward as part of phase 2 of the Diversity in Democracy Project.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs associated with the scoping and introduction of this scheme will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government makes representation to the UK Government in favour of extending the Sunset Clause in the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 be extended to 2050 to allow the continuation of all-women shortlists.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government will write to the UK Government on this issue.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government make representations to the UK Government regarding the enactment of Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010.

Response: Accept

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government assess the effectiveness of the provisions in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 in relation to data collection, and in relation to other candidate data that could be collected within the current devolution framework.

Response: Accept

Recommendations 21 and 22

In addition to making representation to the UK Government, we will consider whether there are opportunities to collect equality data in respect of election candidates through existing Welsh legislation.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets

Diversity in local government

April 2019



The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

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Copies of this document can also be obtained in accessible formats including Braille, large print, audio or hard copy from:

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Diversity in local government

April 2019



About the Committee

The Committee was established on 28 June 2016. Its remit can be found at: www.assembly.wales/SeneddCommunities

Committee Chair:



John Griffiths AM
Welsh Labour
Newport East

Current Committee membership:



Mohammad Asghar AM
Welsh Conservatives
South Wales East



Gareth Bennett AM
UKIP Wales
South Wales Central



Huw Irranca-Davies AM
Welsh Labour
Ogmore



Mark Isherwood AM
Welsh Conservatives
North Wales



Carwyn Jones AM
Welsh Labour
Bridgend



Jenny Rathbone AM
Welsh Labour
Cardiff Central



Leanne Wood AM
Plaid Cymru
Rhondda

The following Members were also members of the Committee during this inquiry.



Jayne Bryant AM
Welsh Labour
Newport West



Siân Gwenllïan AM
Plaid Cymru
Arfon



Jack Sargeant AM
Welsh Labour
Alyn and Deeside



Bethan Sayed AM
Plaid Cymru
South Wales West

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Chair's foreword

Local government in Wales delivers a range of important services to our communities including education and social services. It is charged with understanding the needs of local residents and providing for them. The more representative of the people they serve the better equipped our councillors to carry out their duties and responsibilities.

Unfortunately women, black and minority ethnic communities, individuals with disabilities, LGBT people, the young and those with lower incomes are markedly under represented. Thus their particular experience, views and concerns have too weak a voice.

Work has taken place seeking to remedy this well recognised and long standing inequality. Schemes, programmes and action have initiated from Welsh Government, WLGA, local authorities, equality groups and political parties but without sufficient progress.

Later this year we expect the Local Government Bill to be introduced to the Assembly, providing an opportunity to address these issues. This committee inquiry will help inform that legislation and aid our scrutiny. We have sought to understand the importance of diversity, barriers that hold it back and examples of how they may be overcome.

Our recommendations include the potential of new technology, political awareness education in schools and job share; better support and training; dealing with social media; better data on candidates and schemes and programmes.

John Griffiths AM
Chair

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. We recommend that the Welsh Government, in its forthcoming local government bill, includes provisions to relax the restrictions on members' remote attendance and voting at formal council meetings set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to enable local authorities to trial the use of video communication methods. Page 15

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Recommendation 5. We recommend that the Welsh Government evaluates the work being done by the Welsh Local Government Association to raise awareness among public sector organisations of the benefits of employees undertaking civic duties. Should such an evaluation prove that this work is successful, consideration should be given to how it could be rolled out to private sector businesses. Page 26

Recommendation 6. We recommend that the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association start work on a positive campaign to increase diversity among candidates standing for local government elections by summer 2019. Page 30

Recommendation 7. We recommend that the Welsh Government updates its statutory guidance on training and development to specify that support for members on maintaining a positive work / life balance should be included in the induction programme. Page 33

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- Recommendation 8.** We recommend that the Welsh Government makes it clear to local authorities that members should not be required to publish their home addresses on the authority’s website..... Page 34
- Recommendation 9.** We recommend that the Welsh Government, in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association and the Electoral Commission, urgently addresses deficiencies in guidance for elected representatives, candidates and prospective candidates on what does and does not constitute acceptable behaviour on social media.....Page 39
- Recommendation 10.** We recommend that the Welsh Government and local authorities review the robustness of support mechanisms for members experiencing online abuse, harassment or bullying and implement changes to strengthen this support.....Page 39
- Recommendation 11.** We condemn the action of social media companies in dealing with online abuse and recommend that the Welsh Government presses the UK Government to ensure strong and robust legislation to tackle social media abuse.....Page 39
- Recommendation 12.** We recommend that the Welsh Government seeks to ensure consistency in the implementation of local authorities’ codes on conduct by issuing guidance on their enforcement..... Page 42
- Recommendation 13.** We recommend that the Welsh Government encourage local authorities to adopt a consistent approach to reporting on the care allowance claimed by councillors, by reporting this on a collective basis per allowance rather than detailing each allowance claimed by individual members. Page 47
- Recommendation 14.** We recommend that the Welsh Government requires local authorities to collect information on the number of current councillors eligible to claim the care allowance and how many do so..... Page 47
- Recommendation 15.** We recommend that the Welsh Government commissions a review of all publicly funded mentoring programmes to assess their effectiveness, including value for money.....Page 58
- Recommendation 16.** We recommend that the Welsh Government, following an evaluation of publicly funded programmes, looks at the possibility of establishing a national leadership programme, building on the experience of Chwarae Teg Women’s Equality Network and others to encourage more people from under-represented groups standing for election.....Page 59
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Recommendation 17. We recommend that in the forthcoming local government bill, the Welsh Government includes provisions to roll out an adequate level of political education across schools in Wales. Young people from the ages of 14 and 15 should receive this education, particularly should proposals to extend voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds be implemented. This programme of political awareness should be accompanied by clear lesson plans to empower teachers to deliver the lessons.....Page 61

Recommendation 18. We endorse the recommendation made by ERS Cymru that a national mock election for young people which should be held at the same time as Assembly elections. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers how this can be implemented.....Page 61

Recommendation 19. We recommend that as a matter of priority, the Welsh Government establishes an Access to Elected Office fund in Wales to assist disabled individuals run for elected office. The possibility of extending such a fund to support other under-represented groups should also be explored.....Page 63

Recommendation 20. We recommend that the Welsh Government makes representation to the UK Government in favour of extending the Sunset Clause in the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 be extended to 2050 to allow the continuation of all-women shortlists.....Page 68

Recommendation 21. We recommend that the Welsh Government make representations to the UK Government regarding the enactment of Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010.....Page 70

Recommendation 22. We recommend that the Welsh Government assess the effectiveness of the provisions in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 in relation to data collection, and in relation to other candidate data that could be collected within the current devolution framework.....Page 70

1. Background

1. A report by an expert group on diversity in local government, established by the Welsh Government – *On Balance: Diversifying Democracy in Local Government in Wales*¹ published in 2014 noted that it is:

“vital that the people which make decisions on our behalf [...] are in tune with and representative of their local communities. Unfortunately, when taken as a whole, this is clearly not the case currently for local government in Wales.”

2. It found that the profile of councillors in Wales is still predominantly white, male with an average age of about 60:

“The under-representation of women in political life generally, and local government in particular, has been highlighted as the biggest issue confronting those seeking a council chamber which reflects its electorate [...] there is worrying research suggesting that women are more likely than men to drop out of politics permanently if they lose their seats or decide not to stand again. This could suggest that they are put off by a male dominated organisation, with its associated adversarial style of debate.”

3. The under-representation of women in local government is only part of a wider diversity issue. Increasing representation among younger people, those from different socio-economic backgrounds, individuals from BAME and LGBT community and individuals with disabilities remains a significant challenge.

4. The report by the expert group made a number of recommendations for all stakeholders (Welsh Government, Local Government, Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and political parties), providing an action plan and timings for taking the work forward.

5. The Welsh Government, as part of its response to the recommendations established the Diversity in Democracy programme, which ran from 2014 to 2017. The aim was to increase the diversity of individuals standing for election to local government through a number of measures. They included:

- providing mentoring support for future candidates;

¹ *On Balance: Diversifying Democracy in Local Government in Wales*, March 2014

- publicity campaigns to raise the profile of the work of local government and its members; and
- an exit interview scheme with councillors standing down at elections to determine the reasons for their decision.

6. A number of other organisations run schemes to encourage greater diversity of people standing for local elections, including Chwarae Teg, Women’s Equality Network (WEN) Wales and Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Network (EYST) among others.

7. We agreed to undertake this inquiry on diversity in local government, in advance of the proposed local government bill, which we expect to be introduced by the Welsh Government later in 2019. As part of our work, we wanted to shine a light on examples of good practice and innovative solutions that would help increase the diversity of elected representatives in local government. The terms of reference for the inquiry were to:

- understand the importance of diversity among local councillors, including the effect on public engagement, debate and decision making;
- understand key barriers to attracting a more diverse pool of candidates for local government elections;
- explore areas of innovation and good practice that may help increase diversity in local government;
- explore the potential impact of the proposals in the Welsh Government’s Green Paper, Strengthening Local Government to increasing diversity in Council chambers.

8. In addition to the recommendations we make in this report, the evidence we heard will directly influence our scrutiny of the forthcoming local government bill.

Engaging and gathering evidence

9. From 4 June to 10 September 2018 we ran a public consultation. We received 27 responses from a range of organisations and from individuals. Details of those who provided oral evidence and who responded to our consultation are available as annexes to this report. In addition, we conducted two online surveys, one aimed at gathering views from the general public and the other to gather views from local councillors who are currently in public office. Committee Members also

undertook visits to Cardiff Council, Ceredigion Council and Gwynedd Council to gather evidence directly from councillors from those and neighbouring authorities. We heard oral evidence from the Minister for Local Government and Housing (the Minister) on 9 January 2019.

10. We would like to thank all those who have contributed to our work.

2. Practical solutions

One of the key challenges faced by those standing for local elections, is maintaining a balance between campaigning, their public duties, and their private lives.

11. We heard first hand from councillors across Wales about the pressures placed on local representatives and candidates, in balancing the responsibilities of their private lives, such as a job or care arrangements, with their public ones. This chapter explores some of practical solutions we heard could be implemented in order to alleviate some of the pressures on councillors.

2.1. Technology

12. Evidence presented to the inquiry suggested that technology, particularly the use of messaging services such as Skype, could provide a practical method of increasing the diversity of elected members. Whilst provisions in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the 2011 Measure) allow local authorities to facilitate the use of remote attendance, we heard that the provision as it stands is too restrictive. We heard that using technology could encourage those who may wish to stand for election, who feel that this is incompatible with other commitments, such as work or caring responsibilities.

13. Providing councillors with a system that allows individuals to attend formal council meetings and vote remotely could help individuals who work full or part-time to join meetings during the working day without leaving their work. It could also benefit councillors in rural authorities to join meetings that they might not otherwise have been able to attend.

14. The Head of Policy at the WLGA explained the current restrictions within the 2011 Measure around remote attendance, and the potential benefits of enhancing the role of technology to facilitate attendance at council meetings:

“The intention was very positive, in that it allowed members, potentially, to dive into a meeting from home, and potentially use Skype. Unfortunately, Skype wouldn’t be allowed through the law as it stands. We’ve had discussions with the Welsh Government, and they’re likely to relax it. So, a number of authorities do use Skype for informal meetings—if members are unable to get in to the council chamber, they can just use Skype and have a conversation with officers or

colleagues, and so on. But, in terms of the formal meetings, the Measure is quite strict in terms of how that can be run. So, hopefully, we should get a more relaxed environment that will allow meetings to be held remotely, particularly in areas like Powys—obviously, large geographical areas, rural areas. So, potentially, you could have different members in different parts of the county, all participating in the same meeting.”²

15. The Deputy Chief Executive of One Voice Wales echoed this message in relation to town and community councils:

“a number of councils in Wales have said, ‘We’ve got some members who can’t make it sometimes because they’re working away, so can they take part in the meetings via Skype?’ The answer is that that facility does not apply to community and town councils at the moment. My understanding is that it is discretionary in unitary authorities, so that may be something that could be considered in ongoing legislation.”³

16. One councillor who responded to our survey highlighted the need to modernise local government meeting arrangements:

“we do need to drag local government into the 21st century and enable ICT to be utilised so councillors can participate via email, text etc rather than have to attend meetings in person. On occasion we drag people from all parts of our area for a meeting which might last 10 mins or less.”⁴

17. This is a view supported by the Electoral Reform Society (ERS Cymru), with its Director stating:

“I think that things like Skype, in particular for council meetings could really encourage those who have caring responsibilities and those from a rural background.”⁵

² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 11

³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 29

⁴ [ELGC\(5\)-32-18 paper 5. Inquiry into Diversity in Local Government – survey analysis](#)

⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 170

18. However, she stated that technology is not a panacea, and this “alone won’t necessarily encourage vast amounts of more diverse candidates or elected members to step forward”.⁶

19. In her evidence, the Minister recognised the potential benefits that enhancing the use of technology could bring:

“One of the things we’re very interested in doing is allowing electronic participation in meetings, for example, so if you are an employer, your employee can go to a room in your building for an hour, and doesn’t have to travel for 45 minutes each side of the meeting and all the rest of it—you know, you can actually participate electronically. There’s no reason why we can’t assist with-- . And especially as we have, geographically, very large councils in Wales, where the travelling is a significant part of what takes up the time. So, I’m very keen to look at how we can help councils have more innovative practices in their meetings, both in time and in how they construct the meeting, to allow the participation of a wider group of people.”⁷

Our view

20. We recognise that the many council meetings councillors are required to attend involves significant time commitment. We believe all options should be explored to use technology to ease the pressure on elected representatives – particularly those with other obligations. We acknowledge that there are restrictions around formal meetings within the 2011 Measure and local authorities’ own standing orders. Another potential issue is the reliability of broadband connectivity in some areas of Wales, which is still relatively poor. However, we believe this should not act as a barrier to deploying technology to facilitate remote attendance at meetings by councillors.

21. We would encourage trialling the use of video communication methods, such as Skype, at three local authorities across Wales to enable remote attendance at council meetings, to allow trials to take place in an urban authority, a rural authority and an authority within the south Wales valleys. The Welsh Government should ensure that current restrictions on remote attendance should

⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 170

⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 247

be relaxed, and that the designated local authorities receive appropriate funding to facilitate such a trial.

Recommendation 1. We recommend that the Welsh Government, in its forthcoming local government bill, includes provisions to relax the restrictions on members' remote attendance and voting at formal council meetings set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to enable local authorities to trial the use of video communication methods.

Recommendation 2. We recommend that the Welsh Government works with the Welsh Local Government Association to identify three local authority areas to trial the use of video communication methods to facilitate participation by remote attendance at council meetings.

2. 2. Timing of council meetings

22. According to our survey responses, another significant element that impacts on diversity is the timing of council meetings. This can be restrictive for some, particularly for those in employment and / or those with caring responsibilities. As one councillor who responded to our survey noted, "it's almost impossible to be a councillor and work full-time".⁸ The timetable for Council business may also discourage young people from standing, particularly if meetings are held in the day.

23. How authorities arrange their business is a matter for councillors themselves, and is set out in the 2011 Measure, which requires local authorities to canvass members' preferred option for timing of meetings. The Welsh Government's statutory guidance notes the following:

"It is neither practical nor desirable for the Welsh Government to prescribe the times and frequency of meetings of the full council, committees and sub-committees as these are matters for each local authority to consider in individual circumstances. However, it is important that local authorities do not simply continue to hold their meetings at the same time as they always have done simply out of inertia. What may have been tradition or an arrangement which suited the previous generation of councillors will not necessarily serve the interests of the new intake.

All local authorities should review the times at which meetings are held at least once in every term, preferably shortly after the new council is

⁸ ELGC(5)-32-18 paper 5. Inquiry into Diversity in Local Government – survey analysis

elected. The rule of thumb should be that meetings will be held at times, intervals and locations which are convenient to its members and as far as is practicable have regard to equality and diversity issues.”⁹

24. Local authorities are expected to consider whether daytime or evening meetings are preferred and whether particular times cause difficulties for councillors with particular characteristics, such as age, gender, religion, care responsibilities or being in employment.¹⁰

25. We heard that there is no perfect time for council meetings. The Head of Democratic Services at Conwy County Borough Council referred to “a mix of responses” from councillors on their preferences.¹¹ Councillors who work may prefer early evening meetings, while those with children may prefer daytime meetings to coincide with childcare. Members who are older or retired may prefer daytime meetings, particularly in rural counties where councillors may be required to travel longer distances.

26. During our visit to Ceredigion Council we heard that it held most of its meetings in the day, which according to the Council’s written evidence is “reviewed twice during each administration term”.¹² Participants in the Ceredigion discussion group noted that “older” members tend to opt for daytime working, and since the profile of the Council is predominantly older, this is unlikely to change. Daytime meetings can nevertheless be beneficial for others, including people with children. Some noted that their children are in school during the day, and that early evening meetings clash with children coming home from school, going to clubs and teatime.

27. The Minister noted that local authorities:

“need to think much more carefully about when they have their meetings, because I think that a large number of principal councils in Wales have their meetings in the middle of the afternoon or at 4

⁹ Welsh Government, Statutory Guidance from the Local Government Measure 2011, June 2012, paragraphs 1.9 and 1.10

¹⁰ Welsh Government, Statutory Guidance from the Local Government Measure 2011, June 2012, paragraph 1.12

¹¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 64

¹² Written evidence, DLG 03, Ceredigion County Council

o'clock, which are not excellent times for anyone with any kind of job or caring responsibility and so it puts people off."¹³

Our view

28. We acknowledge that it is not possible to arrange council meetings at a time that is convenient for all. It is right and proper that councils regularly assess the preferences of members in terms of meeting times, and whilst timings will not always be convenient for each elected member, it should be incumbent on the council to make every effort to enable those councillors who may find it difficult to attend.

2.3. Job sharing

29. We were told that allowing councillors to job-share with another member is a practical way of increasing the diversity of councillors standing for office. This could make the role of a councillor more accessible and appealing to those who otherwise would be unable to commit to the role.

30. The Director of ERS Cymru voiced concern that job sharing should not be seen as an option only available to women:

“It’s being talked about at the moment as something for only women, and I think there’s a risk that there’s almost a perception that could develop that it’s something that women can do and men have the full-time jobs, if that makes sense.

I think there’s a real risk. It’s something that should definitely be described as available to all, rather than just for jobs for the girls.”¹⁴

Executive members

31. There was support among witnesses for introducing job sharing arrangements for executive roles, including the WLGA who cited the example of Swansea Council where a Cabinet role is already shared between two executive members.¹⁵ Despite being supportive of the principle, Councillor Debbie Wilcox, Leader of the WLGA, noted a “slight anomaly” in current legislation in relation to

¹³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 246

¹⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraphs 174 - 176

¹⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 17

the size of local authority cabinets and the number of senior salaries payable - Section 11(8) of the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended) states that the number of executive members may not exceed 10. She doubted whether greater job sharing between executive members would have a significant impact on attracting a wider range of candidates:

“Job sharing is unlikely to have a significant impact on prospective councillors. Aspiring to be a cabinet member may not be on many people’s minds at the time of election. But it would have a positive impact on councillors who might be prospective cabinet members, because the flexibility may allow them to consider a role, and, actually, it would have a positive impression, generally, on councils, and it would help us towards our drive to be equal opportunity organisations.”¹⁶

32. The Director of ERS Cymru supported greater job sharing opportunities, again referring to the arrangements in Swansea Council as a successful example:

“The fact that job sharing is already happening at a cabinet level in Wales, and is apparently quite successful for the individuals involved I think is really promising. I think there’s a huge scope for job sharing to be used in Welsh politics. There are, I think, things that need to be put in place to ensure that it’s done in a robust way, so a good agreement with the members themselves, making sure that everything’s clear.”¹⁷

33. The Minister noted that job sharing could also apply to council leaders and confirmed that the forthcoming local government bill would include provisions aimed at making the role of councillor “more attractive,” including “the ability to job share for executive members and leaders of councils” in order to widen executive member and leader roles to people who are unable to work full-time.¹⁸ She went on to say that sharing cabinet positions would not result in increasing the size of cabinets:

¹⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 17

¹⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 173

¹⁸ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 119

“It would have to be within the frame of ‘It’s not an opportunity to increase the size of your cabinet.’ So, each post is discreet, but it could be filled by people sharing it in terms of hours and so on.”¹⁹

Non-executive members

34. We also explored with witnesses their views on the potential of extending job sharing to non-executive council members. Some witnesses supported this concept, with the Director of ERS Cymru noting:

“there’s a huge scope for job sharing to be used in Welsh politics...If you’re talking about actual council members sharing a role, or Assembly members, if here, I think it needs to be put to the electorate that it is a joint position.”²⁰

35. Some of the practical challenges expressed around job-sharing for non-executive members included:

- if one of the two members resign.
- if one of the two members switch party.²¹

36. In response to questions on allowing two people who want to job share putting themselves forward for election, the Director of ERS Cymru stated her belief that it would be “a sign of a healthy democracy” adding:

“I think a lot of voters would actually recognise that as something realistic, that might suit them as well. So, I think almost that we need to lead by example and trial these things, and then maybe we can see more people with caring responsibilities, with different career options, stepping forward into the political arena.”²²

¹⁹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 225

²⁰ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 173

²¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 145

²² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 178

37. The Director of Women’s Equality Network Wales (WEN Wales), whilst acknowledging the need to resolve practical difficulties, also supported greater job sharing for elected representatives:

“As long as people understand it’s one job, as in it’s one role, it’s the same cost to the taxpayer, it’s equally divided—when one person stands down, it’s—. You know, if one person decides to stand down, they both have to stand down; it’s a complete job share. I think it really should be looked at both for the Assembly, although I know legislation would need to change, but I don’t think we should shy away from it, and I think in county council elections it would be a really good way of getting more diverse candidates. It kind of leads on to, ‘Well, how about the pay? Does the pay need to change?’ But I do think job sharing should be a possibility, and it should definitely be something we should be pushing for.”²³

38. Mixed views were expressed by the representatives of political parties who gave evidence. Whilst noting that practical issues would need to be overcome, the Chair of Welsh Labour’s Organisation Committee²⁴ and the Chief Executive of Plaid Cymru²⁵ supported the principle. Conversely, the Boundary Review Director for the Conservative Party was of the view that the practical issues were too numerous.²⁶

39. Whilst noting informal arrangements exist for sharing responsibilities between councillors (between members from the same party in multi-member wards), the WLGA expressed caution around establishing job sharing as the norm for non executive members. Of particular concern is the time-consuming nature of the local councillor role, and the need for flexibility, with the WLGA noting that councillors often work more than the three days a week they are recompensed for.

²³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 35

²⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 145

²⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 149

²⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 147

40. Councillor Debbie Wilcox believed that it “would pose perhaps more difficulty” than job sharing between executive members referred to, but conceded it could be an area for development.²⁷

41. Potential risks in extending job-share for non-executive councillors were expressed by the Minister, particularly in relation to councillors working longer hours:

“I very much fear that, if you do that, what you will actually get is two people working full time, so two people working full time for one salary. Because I don’t know how you would restrict the call on the councillors’ time for both of them.

I fear that what you will end up with is two people, both working full time, for half the pay.”²⁸

42. Despite her caution, the Minister noted:

“there are a number of things to think about before we go for job share at election. I don’t think those barriers exist for doing the job share at the point of appointment inside the council, and we are very keen to push that forward with some dispatch.”²⁹

Our view

43. We believe there is potential for sharing councillor roles to enable individuals who would otherwise be unable commit wholly to the role. This could lead to a wider range of people undertaking these roles. We acknowledge that such arrangements would require clear parameters as to the role and responsibilities of both members and clear communication with the electorate to ensure accountability and transparency.

44. We commend the approach taken by Swansea Council by being the first local authority in Wales to divide an executive position between two members. Following on from this successful precedent, we would like to encourage all local

²⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 19

²⁸ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 229

²⁹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 237

authorities in Wales to consider this approach to enhance the diversity and increase the breadth of experience and skills in their own cabinets.

45. We realise that decisions on the composition of cabinets should be made by individual local authorities, but believe each should have the ability to share some executive positions should they wish to do so. We therefore welcome the Minister's commitment to including provisions to enable this in the forthcoming local government bill. Such provisions should make it clear that where a position is shared, the salary is also shared between the post-holders and how this aligns with restrictions on the size of cabinets.

46. We acknowledge that support for job sharing for non-executive members was mixed. We are aware that the legislative restrictions and logistical concerns are greater than those for sharing executive roles, however we believe these are not insurmountable and merit investigation by the Welsh Government in preparation for its forthcoming local government bill.

Recommendation 3. We recommend that the Welsh Government promotes expanding job sharing opportunities between two individuals for executive members of local authorities, as has been undertaken successfully in Swansea Council.

Recommendation 4. We recommend that the Welsh Government explore the feasibility of enabling job sharing between two individuals for non-executive members of local authorities and include provisions to enable this in its forthcoming local government bill.

2. 4. Role of employers

47. The Employment Rights Act 1996 makes provision for the right to time off for public duties. Section 50 states that an employer must permit an employee who is a member of a local authority time off during the employee's working hours for the purpose of performing the duties of their office.

48. The evidence received did not suggest that employers are a particular barrier to people standing for election . The Head of Policy at the WLGA referred to statistics from the Welsh Government's survey of councillors which stated that among current county councillors in Wales, around 35% are in full-time employment, 14% in part-time employment and 16% are self-employed. He also referred to evidence collected through the WLGA's survey of councillors who stood down at the last election, stating that:

“very few people mentioned that their employers were a hindrance to their role as a councillor...the feedback we have is that employers are supportive.”³⁰

49. Despite this, he also said that employers can refuse requests for time off work to do activities such as being a councillor if it becomes onerous, and that:

“A significant number of councillors are having to juggle their employed role and their council role, and sometimes they have to take time off work and sometimes they have to work very flexibly.”³¹

50. The Chair of Welsh Labour’s Organisation Committee noted that the days where employers saw the provision of public duty as a civic duty have gone, and that there’s a “big job” to do to encourage employers to give their employees the opportunity to stand:

“We’re missing so many opportunities for people to have so many skills that we could use, not just in local government, but in all sorts of different spheres.”³²

51. The WLGA’s Head of Policy told us that supporting and encouraging businesses to understand the benefits of their employees becoming councillors was important, adding:

“Where their members of staff become councillors, it’s incredibly good in terms of personal development, professional development potentially, and there’s a clear demonstration of businesses’ corporate social responsibility and commitment to the community.”³³

52. The Chief Executive of Chwarae Teg, herself a former councillor, also noted a lack of understanding of the role of a councillor, and the benefits to both employer and employee:

³⁰ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 33

³¹ Ibid

³² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraphs 152 and 153

³³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 34

“My employer saw it as a positive that I was able to gain that kind of breadth of experience across a range of public services...having a supportive employer certainly removes a barrier.”³⁴

53. The Boundary Review Commissioner for the Conservative Party suggested that it is an issue that employers forums could discuss and share good practice:

“There are some employers who are very good and really see the benefit of having someone giving public service who is an employee. Obviously, it’s easier for the larger employers than the small employers, but there is a benefit. I think what we need to do is, in employers’ forums, talk about this issue. And employers who do it very well could actually educate those who are less good at it and show them the benefits that can be received.”³⁵

54. The Chief Executive of Chwarae Teg explained how the timing of meetings can pose particular difficulties for members who also need to balance their council responsibilities with their outside employment:

“all of this goes hand-in-hand with issues around the times at which council meetings are held, how we try to get the balance between supporting people who may have caring responsibilities versus those who work.”³⁶

55. The Head of Democratic Services at Conwy County Borough Council explained some of the difficulties faced by members who also hold other employment:

“with those councillors that aren’t employed in the public sector, the reasonable time off that they’re allowed is to attend the full council meetings. So, then, if you imagine all the other committee meetings that they have to attend, it’s really difficult. They have to prioritise, together with their training programmes, and then if their attendance isn’t 100 per cent, they do get criticised by the public for not being

³⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 47

³⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 157

³⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 47

there 100 per cent of the time. So, it is a really, really difficult balancing act for the councillors.”³⁷

56. The Head of Policy at the WLGA told us how the organisation will be working with public sector organisations as part of its campaign for the next local election in 2022:

“part of our campaign will be about engaging with public sector employees in particular to just encourage and promote the fact that their staff should consider standing for election, both as personal professional development but also as a contribution to their communities as well.”³⁸

Our view

57. We acknowledge the difficulties for employers in regularly releasing staff for council duties whilst maintaining the business need of their own organisation. This will be particularly challenging for small businesses who rely on a smaller workforce. However, it is crucial that elected members are afforded the necessary time to carry out their duties effectively; we believe that fostering a greater understanding among employers about the role and responsibilities of councillors could assist with this.

58. We welcome the commitment by the WLGA to working with public sector organisations to bring a better understanding of the benefits of employees undertaking civic duties such as being a local elected representative. This work should be evaluated, and should it prove successful, consideration should be given to how it could be rolled out to private sector businesses.

59. As we have previously explored, remote attendance at meetings could have a significant impact on members’ ability to participate in proceedings with less impact on other aspects of their lives. This could bring particular benefits for members who need to juggle work with their council responsibilities; allowing an employee a smaller amount of time to connect to a meeting remotely, possibly from a space within their work premises, could be beneficial for both the employer and the employee. Implementing our recommendation one would enable such an arrangement.

³⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 47

³⁸ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 46

60. We did not receive sufficient evidence to evaluate the extent employers adhere to section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, and we recognise that further investigation is needed to determine best practice in allowing employees time off during working hours to undertake civic duties. We believe there is merit in undertaking such investigation in order to get a clear picture for employers and employees of best practice.

Recommendation 5. We recommend that the Welsh Government evaluates the work being done by the Welsh Local Government Association to raise awareness among public sector organisations of the benefits of employees undertaking civic duties. Should such an evaluation prove that this work is successful, consideration should be given to how it could be rolled out to private sector businesses.

3. Information and support

We heard that more information on the role of local authority members is needed, both in terms of raising public awareness and in preparing candidates for the position.

3.1. The role of local elected representatives

61. We heard that there was a general lack of awareness among the public about the role of elected officials, and that a greater understanding of the role and responsibilities could encourage some individuals to stand. 29 per cent of the public who responded to our survey noted that a better understanding of the role and responsibilities of a councillor would help them.

62. Councillors who responded to our survey agreed that more needed to be done raise awareness of the role in order to encourage a greater diversity of candidates standing for local council elections, suggestions included:

“greater education of what the role actually entails.”

“Educate people as to what a good councillor does and the impact they can have on the local community.”

“I believe politics etc. Should be taught in schools and colleges to give young people an insight into politics and may encourage younger people to stand for Councillors.”³⁹

63. The Head of Democratic Services at Conwy County Borough Council told us that information is available, but that some people have difficulty in finding and accessing it. She told us that councils generally have information on their website, such as a “Be a councillor” page, which may include videos with information about the role of a councillor. The WLGA also produce candidate’s guidance, which include a summary of roles and responsibilities of councillors.⁴⁰

64. Councillor Debbie Wilcox told us she believed that educating young people was key to raising awareness:

³⁹ ELGC(5)-32-18 paper 5. Inquiry into Diversity in Local Government – survey analysis

⁴⁰ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 67

“I would strongly advocate a clear pathway for learning in our schools and particularly as [], there’s a move towards voting at 16. Our young people really do want to know about politics and political structures, and I think it could encompass that. Education is a key here and I think young people would help us, certainly, to spread the word.”⁴¹

65. The Director of ERS Cymru concurred that political education was key to raising awareness, but that whilst educating young people in schools is easier, doing it for the wider population would be more challenging.⁴² She did not believe that such an initiative needed to be legislated for, but that:

“it would need a strong policy direction and to be rolled out effectively like a very good campaign. I don’t know if it’s necessarily a law; it’s a campaign that needs to fundamentally underline that.”⁴³

66. One suggestion was to have a nationally co-ordinated campaign to explain what local councillors do, while others suggested greater distribution of information through organisations that people work for. The Chief Executive Officer of Race Council Cymru proposed:

“I would suggest that perhaps we could propose a two-pronged approach, where more information is produced and distributed through local community centres, through established grass-roots, ethnic minority groups across Wales, but also through organisations, employers, like some of those in—you know, local authorities themselves, in policing sectors, in private sectors. Let there be information sharing and an encouragement at all sorts of levels—the local education authority, you know, all the public, private and third sector strategic boards, where the message could be got out that all staff should be briefed about the opportunity to be supported, as organisations that are forward thinking.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 69

⁴² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 203

⁴³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 207

⁴⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 54

67. The Boundary Review Commissioner for the Conservative Party suggested that the political parties had a role to play in raising awareness of the role:

“I don’t think there is an understanding of roles and responsibilities. I think the parties, as has been said, have a real role here and I think that is why I say it’s important to increase the pool of people interested and then invite them to some sort of seminar where they can come and discuss much more about those sorts of roles and responsibilities.”⁴⁵

68. The Chair of Welsh Labour’s Organisation Committee told us that the party had taken action to encourage greater public involvement in politics:

“we’ve appointed a community organiser that will look to encourage ordinary members of the public to get involved, not just with the Labour Party, but in politics in general.”⁴⁶

69. The Minister also believed that there is a need for greater information on the role so that when people are considering or being encouraged to stand for election they have a better understanding of what they would be signing up for:

“running a real campaign about what your local councillor can actually do for you in your community and what their role on the council is, what the decisions they can make are, what a dramatic impact they have on day-to-day life in your community.”⁴⁷

70. The Minister went on to say that the Welsh Government should be involved in running such a campaign. She noted that she would discuss with the WLGA running it “as early as possible, not just in the teeth of the election, because it is now that people are thinking about standing for election”.⁴⁸

Our view

71. The accessibility of information on the role of councillors is clearly an area for improvement. Without simple, clear and accessible information, potential candidates who are not already engaged with political parties, will not necessarily

⁴⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 165

⁴⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 178

⁴⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 121

⁴⁸ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 123

understand what the role entails. Neither will they necessarily recognise that it is a role they could do themselves.

72. We realise that local authorities do provide information online, however, unless individuals are specifically looking for this information, it is unlikely to be seen by most of the public. Increasing awareness and understanding among the public of what elected members do does not need to be expensive and much more can be done online. We heard that short video clips are being used to explain the role, these could potentially provide a great deal of information in a short time in an accessible way. Social media is one of the main sources of distributing and gathering information, particularly for young people. It should be used to a far greater extent to raise awareness and profile of the role of councillors.

73. We are aware of the “Local Democracy Week” programme run by Bridgend County Borough Council every year to encourage a broader diversity of candidates in the area, which includes a potential candidate session where the public were invited to find out more about the process of becoming a councillor and their responsibilities. We acknowledge that whilst feedback revealed many were put off by the workload and demands of the role, a number of the attendees were subsequently elected as councillors.

74. We welcome the Minister’s commitment to working with the WLGA on an a positive campaign to raise awareness of the councillor role and urge that this should begin now in order to attract candidates for the next local government election in 2022. We believe that the WLGA also has a role in sharing examples of good practice between local authorities when innovative ways of raising awareness are used.

Recommendation 6. We recommend that the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association start work on a positive campaign to increase diversity among candidates standing for local government elections by summer 2019.

3. 2. Training and support for councillors

75. The 2011 Measure makes provision for the training and development of members. The statutory guidance accompanying that Measure notes that local authorities must provide reasonable training and development opportunities for their members. However, the Measure does not define what constitutes reasonable training and development. We heard that whilst training and development is delivered by individual local authorities, the WLGA works with the

authorities to develop role descriptions, competency framework, an induction curriculum and an ongoing training and development programme.⁴⁹

76. The Head of Democratic Services at Conwy County Borough Council told us that the system for training and development is robust, with an induction programme that lasts for the first 12 months after an election. The WLGA also provides training, such as scrutiny and chairing skills.⁵⁰ She went on to say:

“despite the training and support offered, some councillors do struggle to commit the time to the training programme when it’s on top of everything else that they have to do, and some are just not interested in the training.”⁵¹

77. The Chair of the Cardiff and Vale Local Party for the Welsh Liberal Democrats told us that the scale of work following her election was “a shock to the system,” adding:

“I was going through piles of paperwork that I wasn’t thinking I’d be having to do. It was a learning curve for me, and that kind of commitment, the timings as well—those things are not laid out anywhere, really, and they probably need to be.”⁵²

78. The Minister told us that the role can be demanding and overwhelming, which may take a toll on the member and their family. She noted that the point of Democratic Services was to support backbench members, with comprehensive training and support programmes, but questioned whether support has “been as effective as it might have been in every council”. She noted that the forthcoming local government bill proposes to include additional measures around training and support.⁵³

⁴⁹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 96

⁵⁰ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraphs 96 & 97

⁵¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 97

⁵² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 163

⁵³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 136

Boundaries for councillors

79. As part of the wider discussion around training and support, we also explored the issue of supporting members with “boundaries” to protect member “burnout”.

80. The Head of Policy at the WLGA spoke of the difficulty in putting boundaries around the role of councillor, given the nature of the role in being part of the community they serve, and constituents’ growing expectations for an immediate response:

“people do stop you every time of the day and people do expect you to answer your phone at midnight if they’ve got an issue in terms of housing. Christmas Day is not a holiday for most councillors.[] That goes with the territory, unfortunately.[] People put something on social media and they expect an instantaneous response, whatever time of the day, unfortunately. So, it’s a fast-moving world now, and, unfortunately, public expectations are extremely challenging for members.”⁵⁴

81. Councillor Debbie Wilcox spoke of her own experience as a councillor, noting that:

“All councillors will have mobile phones and laptops and access, but that’s—. It doesn’t stop the general public expecting. If my phone rings at 10:30 on a Sunday night, which it does, I don’t answer it.”⁵⁵

82. Councillor Wilcox also raised the related aspect of the publication of councillors’ address details and explained how members in her local authority, Newport City Council, had been given the option of not publishing their addresses on the authority’s website and being contacted through the council instead.⁵⁶

83. The Minister, responding to questions on these issues noted:

“We ought to encourage people to stand as councillors who perhaps don’t want their homes to turn into [an] outpost of the council, because

⁵⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 100

⁵⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 102

⁵⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 104

actually it's a job as well, so you ought to be able to direct your post and your constituents and so on to the council."⁵⁷

"So, we need to put systems in place that allow councillors who want to have a more working relationship with their job rather than a vocational one, if you like, to be able to do that and still to be perceived by the community as the very good councillors that they are. It shouldn't be a requirement that you're on call 24/7 in order to be seen as a good councillor."⁵⁸

Our view

84. Whilst we heard that local authorities provide a package of training for their members, it is unclear from the evidence received whether the training programmes are effective, particularly in dealing with the increased pressures placed on councillors. We understand councillors face difficulties in balancing the need to be active in their communities with maintaining a healthy work / life balance and believe that supporting members, particularly those new to the position, in dealing with the heavy workload and how to respond to the demands on their time should be an integral part of the training provided.

85. We were particularly concerned by the expectation that councillors' home addresses are routinely published on local authority websites, which is not the case for other elected representatives such as AMs and MPs. Whilst we understand that some councillors may be content for their home addresses to be publicly available and see this as an integral aspect of being embedded in their communities, and that many constituents already aware of where their local councillors live, it should not be a requirement on those who may be reluctant to do so.

Recommendation 7. We recommend that the Welsh Government updates its statutory guidance on training and development to specify that support for members on maintaining a positive work / life balance should be included in the induction programme.

⁵⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 129

⁵⁸ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 133

Recommendation 8. We recommend that the Welsh Government makes it clear to local authorities that members should not be required to publish their home addresses on the authority's website.

4. Bullying, Discrimination and Harassment

We heard that elected representatives have experienced bullying, discrimination and harassment as part of their public lives, and that the fear of such experience is a barrier to many potential candidates.

86. Of the councillors who participated in our survey, a quarter had experienced abuse, bullying, discrimination or harassment from within their local community; one in five (19.2 per cent) from within the council; one in ten (11.8 per cent) from within their political party or group. Only a third of councillors had not suffered such behaviour during their time in office.

87. The Director of WEN Wales emphasised the extent of the situation:

“the general perception that if you go into public life, you’re going to get a hell of a lot of grief is also a really big barrier.”⁵⁹

88. The Chief Executive of Chwarae Teg spoke of her experience as a former councillor:

“Certainly, when I had a brief and unsuccessful spell chairing Cardiff council, we tried to improve the conduct within the council chamber, so that you create a culture where that is not tolerated, and if it’s not tolerated in the council chamber, it’s not tolerated in the platforms and the discussions around that, and that you create a more supportive network of councillors cross party to say, ‘Actually, we want a higher standard of debate.’ I think that takes a lot of discipline and commitment from existing councillors and the officers supporting that, because the tendency can be, as you’ve talked about here, just to default to a very confrontational-style debate that’s very aggressive, very macho, where my experience was that women of all political parties would, sort of, eye-roll across the chamber as the next irate, older male councillor stood up to say his piece. So, I think that translates into social media as well. We have a responsibility to support each other and to

⁵⁹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 5

call it out, and I think it's perfectly acceptable for the ombudsman to have a role in that."⁶⁰

4. 1. Social Media

89. We heard evidence of the positive and negative impact social media can have on political discourse. Whilst it has provided elected members with a platform to engage and communicate with their constituents in a way that was not previously possible, it also provides a platform for some individuals to engage in abuse and harassment.

90. Councillor Debbie Wilcox explained the downsides of engaging on social media:

“There’s probably not a politician in this room that hasn’t seen that downside, and if you’re a woman politician, then there are significant extra downsides to that. Research is widely showing now that it is becoming an increasingly crowded and antagonistic space.”⁶¹

91. Councillors who responded to our survey cited online abuse as a problem both whilst standing for election, during their time in office and as a reason for standing down. Comments received from councillors included:

“Social media and the new climate of abuse and hate has made things different and more personal.

Social Media became a barrier and a challenge for it was used for personnel attacks and distracted voters from the main issues of my manifesto.”⁶²

92. The WLGA told us it has produced basic guidance for councillors on using and dealing with social media abuse, particularly around blocking, muting and referring matters to the police. However, Councillor Wilcox believes the law needs to “catch up”:

“the WLGA have provided guides for councillors that can be used for candidates as well, we’ve got a training and briefing session. The guides have been very well received. So, we’ve got a basic guide about social

⁶⁰ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 89

⁶¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 5

⁶² [ELGC\(5\)-32-18 paper 5. Inquiry into Diversity in Local Government – survey analysis](#)

media, covering the benefits, the pitfalls and the law, but it's this online abuse, and we've produced some supplementary guidance on that. [] I think it's all our problem, and I genuinely think the law has to catch up with what's happening out there in the social media realm. I think the law's lagging behind."⁶³

93. Witnesses agreed that more pressure needs to be put on social media companies to act on social media abuse. The Head of Policy at the WLGA told us:

"it's putting pressure on the social media companies, because both of them, the biggest ones, Twitter, Facebook, they almost say in the terms and conditions that criticism and abuse of elected politicians and people in public life is almost fair game because it's part of debate.

there have been some very public examples of where that challenge of politicians has clearly overstepped the mark, clearly offensive, clearly abusive, and, yet, either Twitter or Facebook just will not deal with it, and I think there's a responsibility on those bodies and others to deal with this."⁶⁴

94. The Chief Executive of Race Council Cymru emphasised the detrimental impact of online abuse to both candidates and elected members. She also suggested that a zero-tolerance approach to bullying, abuse and harassment on social media was needed:

"On social media, it's been horrendous, some of what they publish against people for taking a public office. [] I mean, this could really ruin a whole person's life, and I think maybe a cross-party approach on zero tolerance to bullying on social media, engaging with Facebook, Twitter and Instagram proprietors to agree a form of code of conduct, a cut-off point, where people's lives are respected, because it is discouraging to more people because when they see what's happening to those who have been elected it is very discouraging."⁶⁵

⁶³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 110

⁶⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraphs 115 - 117

⁶⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 91

95. The Women’s Officer for NUS Wales agreed that a zero tolerance approach to online abuse is needed, along with procedures in place to deal with abusive behaviour:

“there needs to be a stronger zero tolerance culture across the board on social media abuse, online abuse. [] I look at Diane Abbott and I look at the abuse that she’s received on and offline, and I think, ‘Oh my gosh, as a black woman I would never want to put myself in that position’. So, I think it starts with making sure that young people and everyone understand that, if they want to stand for election and if they receive this type of abuse, there are going to be proper procedures in place that, if someone’s abusing them online, they have a clear way that they can report it; once it’s been reported, there are clear guidelines and policies in place so that those people can be prosecuted. And I think having that zero tolerance culture be more prominent will help to end that type of abuse.”⁶⁶

96. The Minister stated she was happy to look at whether authorities require external expertise to support members with social media training:

“The local authority needs to be that team for the councillor, doesn’t it, and have that conversation about how to deal with it, what they’d like to have happen, what the best way for each individual person to deal with this is...so, we need to help the local authority to have that expertise inside it.”⁶⁷

Our view

97. It is clear from the evidence that online abuse and harassment and the impact of this on individuals and their families is a real concern for elected representatives and a barrier for prospective candidates. It is of particular concern that those from under-represented groups are more likely to be the target of online abuse and harassment. This situation is unacceptable, and action is needed to stamp out abusive online behaviour.

98. We acknowledge that the WLGA has taken steps to assist members by issuing guidance on dealing with online abuse. However, there does not appear to be a consistent and comprehensive approach, or adequate support mechanisms

⁶⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 330

⁶⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 211

for members to deal with online abuse and harassment. We therefore believe there is an urgent need for more comprehensive guidance on what is acceptable behaviour for candidates and elected members on social media.

99. We acknowledge that elected members are subjected to online harassment from members of the public. Although political parties and local authorities are not in a position to prevent this, they should ensure that appropriate support is in place for members who experience this behaviour.

Recommendation 9. We recommend that the Welsh Government, in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association and the Electoral Commission, urgently addresses deficiencies in guidance for elected representatives, candidates and prospective candidates on what does and does not constitute acceptable behaviour on social media.

Recommendation 10. We recommend that the Welsh Government and local authorities review the robustness of support mechanisms for members experiencing online abuse, harassment or bullying and implement changes to strengthen this support.

Recommendation 11. We condemn the action of social media companies in dealing with online abuse and recommend that the Welsh Government presses the UK Government to ensure strong and robust legislation to tackle social media abuse.

4. 2. Independent adjudicator

100. We discussed with witnesses the proposal of establishing an independent adjudicator to deal with cases of bullying or harassment between political colleagues from within the same party within local government.

101. The Director of ERS Cymru supported establishing the role of an independent adjudicator since political parties had not dealt adequately with cases of abuse, discrimination or harassment between fellow members:

“the thing we heard a lot about was abuse from other politicians. I think parties have seriously lacked in effectively handling that. One of the things that we would urge is an independent process around that. So, parties, I think, when having issues, should be essentially removed from that process and an independent adjudicator should come in and say

how that should be dealt with. I think that would help a lot of people feel that there was an element of accountability there.”⁶⁸

102. The Director of WEN Wales also supported establishing an independent adjudicator to increase confidence in the process:

“The other important thing to say about tackling this is we need an independent process. I think it’s difficult for political parties themselves, for members of that political party, to adjudicate over cases, and I think we need independent adjudicators to give confidence to the public, because I think if young women are looking at the system today and looking at what’s going on, they are really put off.”⁶⁹

103. The Director of ERS Cymru acknowledged that setting up a specific independent adjudicator could be seen as resource intensive, but that:

“the options are: tackling something properly, or attempting to tackle something properly, and letting this situation carry on where abuse and harassment is clearly a massive barrier to more diverse people standing for election.”⁷⁰

104. She added that she did not believe that such a function could sit with an existing body:

“I can’t think of any body that would necessarily have that function at the moment. I’m sure there is a potential to extend an existing body’s functions, but I think that independence needs to be key. I think it would make a strong signal in setting up something specifically, to establish that strong line around this issue. I think councillors would pay attention to that too, if there was something distinct set up for them.”⁷¹

Our view

105. Whilst we recognise the merits of establishing an independent adjudicator to investigate accusations of bullying and harassment between political colleagues,

⁶⁸ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 212

⁶⁹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 85

⁷⁰ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 214

⁷¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 230

setting up such a body would require significant resource. An independent process is key to investigating such complaints, and we believe that local authorities should ensure that the appropriate democratic services staff possess the necessary expertise to mediate. The role of local authority monitoring officers should be strengthened in this regard.

4. 3. Joint Code of Conduct

106. Another suggestion put forward was a joint code of conduct agreed by all political parties, particularly in the conduct of candidates and members online. Whilst we did not hear of any comparable examples or good practice available, many of the witnesses supported the idea.

107. The Director of ERS Cymru told us that it would “help if all parties were on the same page and had a consistent, accountable and transparent line against abuse and harassment”.⁷² The Director of WEN Wales concurred:

“unless we have strong codes of conduct in each political party and between each political party about how people are going to conduct themselves, then I think people will still be put off.”⁷³

108. We heard that such a code would require political parties to sign up to a set of common principles around intimidatory behaviour. The Director of ERS Cymru noted that she would anticipate that “an agreement between parties on processes to deal with abuse and harassment” would form part of the code. She suggested that it could also include procedures for reporting and establishing formal procedures for dealing with complaints.⁷⁴

109. The Chair of Welsh Labour’s Organisation Committee said that the party would need to look at the detail of such a code of practice before signing up.⁷⁵ The Boundary Review Director for the Conservative Party agreed that “there needs to be a much better, much stronger, code of conduct as to what is acceptable on

⁷² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 210

⁷³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 85

⁷⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 217

⁷⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 235

social media,”⁷⁶ while the Chief Executive of Plaid Cymru believed this is within both local government and the parties’ ability to deal with:

“Now, that is something that is within local government’s ability to deal with. It’s within the parties’ ability to deal with it. And that should be the focus of parties and local government. It should be completely unacceptable.”⁷⁷

110. Despite some support for the principle of a joint code of conduct between political parties, it is unclear how independent candidates and councillors would fit in to such a code.

Our view

111. All political parties have a responsibility to ensure that their elected representatives, candidates and prospective candidates behave in a way that shows respect to others, including representatives of other political parties. Whilst we understand the rationale for a joint code of conduct between political parties, we did not receive sufficient evidence as to what it should encompass.

112. Local authorities already have codes of conduct in place and elected members will be expected to adhere to those codes. We believe that it should be the role of local authority monitoring officers to ensure members are aware of the code upon their election and to enforce the provision. Local authority codes of conduct should be implemented consistently across Wales, and guidance should be available to monitoring officers to ensure this.

Recommendation 12. We recommend that the Welsh Government seeks to ensure consistency in the implementation of local authorities’ codes on conduct by issuing guidance on their enforcement.

⁷⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 181

⁷⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 243

5. Terms and remuneration

We explored with witnesses the terms and remuneration of the councillor role, and whether these pose a barrier to attracting a more diverse range of candidates.

5.1. Salary

113. We heard that remuneration is an issue that needs addressing as the current salary is potentially deterring some people from considering standing. The salary is set by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW). Currently councillors in Wales are paid for 3 days a week, which equates to a salary of around £13,600. However, the WLGA note that the workload is far higher in reality, with the Head of Democratic Services at Conwy County Borough Council noting that:

“Most councillors are now saying that they do work full time.”⁷⁸

114. The representative noted that the IRPW:

“admits that it undervalues councillors as it’s been unable to maintain the link to its own benchmark due to political and public pressure. If it had been able to maintain that link, it estimates that the basic salary for a councillor now would be around the £16,000 mark, but it isn’t; it is only £13,600.”⁷⁹

115. The IRPW annual report 2019-2020 states:

“During our visits to all principal councils last year many members expressed the view that, compared with a traditional paid employment the basic salary is too low to attract younger people and to encourage greater diversity. They also pointed out the significant differences between remuneration and support available to elected members in other levels of government in Wales. They proposed that the level of the

⁷⁸ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 134

⁷⁹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 132

basic salary should therefore be raised significantly in recognition of the importance of the role of an elected member of a principal council.”⁸⁰

116. That annual report proposes a “modest increase” of 1.97% in member salaries to £13,868.⁸¹

117. The Head of Democratic Services at Conwy County Borough Council stated that the basic salary is “not an insignificant amount” and that it “accurately recompenses members for the time commitment and responsibility of the role”, but that it is “unlikely to incentivise anyone to stand for office”.⁸²

118. There was consensus that councillor salaries are not sufficient to attract under-represented groups. The Women’s Officer for NUS Wales told us:

“With the current pay package, it would be quite hard to see how, for example, a young mother would want to stand or do the job as a councillor...that salary probably wouldn’t be enough.”⁸³

119. The Chair of Welsh Labour’s Organisation Committee spoke of the need to balance a salary that is acceptable to constituents at a time of austerity while being sufficient to attract people to the role. He added:

“what we don’t want to do is to see this as a nice little earner that will take someone up to retirement age. We need to have a salary level that will attract people into the role and not be a barrier to them being able to stand for public office.”⁸⁴

120. The Minister noted that the Welsh Government is not in a position to give councils additional funding to make up the shortfall in salaries. However, she did acknowledge the issue, and that the “remuneration package does drive all kinds of other issues”. She noted that it is important to avoid “a situation in which only

⁸⁰ Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, Annual Report 2019 – 2020, paragraph 5

⁸¹ Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, Annual Report 2019 – 2020, paragraph 6

⁸² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 133

⁸³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 344

⁸⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 217

people who are independently wealthy or already retired are the only people who can come forward to be councillors”.⁸⁵

Our view

121. We acknowledge that the salary paid to councillors is relatively low and is unlikely act as an incentive for people to stand for office. However it is also important to ensure that salaries are set at a level that is affordable to local authorities and acceptable to the public, particularly at a time where services are being cut. We are aware that the IRPW acknowledge that councillor salaries do not maintain a link to its own benchmark and that councillors often work more than the three days a week they are recompensed for. We note that the IRPW has proposed a slight increase in councillor salaries and are content that it will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that councillors receive a fair remuneration.

5. 2. Care allowance

122. Councillors carrying out public duties are entitled to claim allowances, such as for travel and subsistence with eligible members also entitled to claim a care allowance for dependents. We heard that negativity towards elected members’ expenses has resulted in people being deterred from claiming the allowances they are entitled to for fear of public criticism.

123. The Director of WEN Wales told us that although “people should be able to claim their full entitlement and there should be no stigma around that”, respondents to its consultation, including former councillors or candidates noted that it was:

“frowned upon for councillors to claim their full entitlement of payments and remuneration.”⁸⁶

124. Although eligible members are entitled to £403 care allowance a month, we heard that take-up of this allowance was very low. The IRPW has consistently reported that members are reluctant to submit a claim for it, noting in its annual report for 2019-20 that:

⁸⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 251

⁸⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 109

“It is clear that very few members are utilising the provision in the Framework to reimburse the costs of care. It appears that some members are still reluctant to claim all that they are entitled to support them in their role, because of concerns about the adverse publicity this can attract.”⁸⁷

125. The IRPW provides councils with two options in respect of the publication of the reimbursement of the costs of care, with each authority able to decide which it considers appropriate:

- The details of the amounts reimbursed to named members; or
- The total amount reimbursed by the authority during the year but not attributed to any named member.

126. The Chief Executive of Plaid Cymru suggested that the reimbursement of the care allowance should be reported as an overall figure across a local authority rather than attributed to individual members in order to increase its take-up:

“I know that the provision of childcare is a problem: despite the fact that there is an allowance available, that allowance goes against the person claiming it. That should be reported at council level and not at individual level, because that is a barrier.”⁸⁸

127. The Minister concurred that there is “a real problem with people not claiming the expenses they are entitled to, particularly for carers’ allowances”⁸⁹ and stated that she was “open to suggestions for how we might deal with allowances issue”. She added, however, that it would be important to seek the view of the Information Commissioner with regard to responding to freedom of information requests should claims be reported on a consolidated rather than individual level:

“I want to have a conversation with the Information Commissioner’s Office about what attitude they will take to freedom of information requests, if the council aggregates the response, because that’s great if the council does that so that you don’t get individuals, but if you can FOI it back to the individual, then, clearly, that completely undermines the whole thing. So, we need to discuss with the Information

⁸⁷ Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, Annual Report 2019-20, paragraph 8

⁸⁸ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 265

⁸⁹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 206

Commissioner's Office the public purpose of what we're trying to do and get them to come on board with reporting it in that way and not going underneath it for individual requests."⁹⁰

Our view

128. We are concerned by the evidence that councillors are not claiming allowances they are entitled to for fear of criticism. We are particularly concerned by the apparent reluctance to claim the care allowance, which is an important tool to enable those with caring responsibilities to undertake the councillor role. It is therefore crucial that those who are entitled to this support claim for it.

129. We would be interested to know how many of the current councillors in Wales are entitled to claim the care allowance. We believe that the WLGA should work with local authorities to collect this information in order to gather an accurate understanding of the extent members claim this allowance.

130. The way local authorities report on the allowances claimed by members could influence their take-up. We are aware that it is possible for local authorities to report on the collective amount of allowance claimed rather than reporting by individual member. We recognise the importance of ensuring transparency across all levels of government, however, we believe we must look to remove barriers and facilitate a broader membership within local government.

131. We acknowledge the Minister's comments in relation to seeking advice from the Information Commissioner, and subject to that, would like to see local authorities move to reporting allowances collectively rather than per individual member.

Recommendation 13. We recommend that the Welsh Government encourage local authorities to adopt a consistent approach to reporting on the care allowance claimed by councillors, by reporting this on a collective basis per allowance rather than detailing each allowance claimed by individual members.

Recommendation 14. We recommend that the Welsh Government requires local authorities to collect information on the number of current councillors eligible to claim the care allowance and how many do so.

⁹⁰ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 253

5. 3. Full-time councillors on full time pay

132. One suggestion we heard was the potential to make the role of a councillor (non-executive members) a full-time position. The proposal would require a significant reduction in the number of councillors to enable an increase in member salary. We heard contrasting views on this.

133. Some witnesses said that this option should be considered. The Director of ERS Cymru said:

“The reason we recommended fewer councillors on a stronger remuneration package was to address the diversity issue. So, there should be measures built in. I think that would have to be done with a package of quotas. The two, for me, are very strongly linked together. This is about having a status of local authority member or a role of local authority member that could properly facilitate people from more diverse backgrounds being able to come forward and actually do the job.”⁹¹

134. She also noted that the demands on councillors are growing, both in terms of their political and personal demands:

“People have told us that it’s very difficult for them to work part-time or full-time as a councillor while balancing childcare issues, while balancing other duties for work.”⁹²

135. The WLGA confirmed this view, with the Head of Democratic Services at Conwy County Borough Council telling us that:

“the role has expanded in recent years in terms of demand...so the role of a councillor is growing, and it is expanding.”⁹³

136. There was some support from the political sphere, with the Chief Executive of Plaid Cymru noting:

⁹¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 248

⁹² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 248

⁹³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 134

“if we want a radical change, we need to consider radical measures.”⁹⁴

137. However, we also heard there are potential downsides. The Chief Executive of Chwarae Teg told us that in her personal view, the role of a councillor should not be a full-time position because:

“That puts off as many people as it would attract. The breadth that you get of people who are retired, employed or work part-time is the kind of breadth that you need in local government.”⁹⁵

138. We also heard that fewer councillors could mean less opportunity and more competition for selection, potentially diminishing the diversity of members, including making it harder for those in lower socio-economic groups to become councillors. The Women’s Officer for NUS Wales shared her concerns noting:

“With full-time, I think, yes, the pay might be higher, but then, I think, with the fewer roles, that would be another barrier to diversity.”⁹⁶

Our view

139. We have not been persuaded that full time councillors on full time pay would result in increasing the diversity of candidates standing for election. In fact, we are concerned that a reduction in the number of councillors could have the reverse effect, with fewer opportunities for people to stand. Minority groups and women are already under-represented in local government, and we are concerned that reducing the opportunities could further restrict diversity.

5. 4. Resettlement grants

140. While resettlement grants for members who do not retain their seats was only fleetingly mentioned, the Head of Policy at the WLGA emphasised the risk that councillors take in order to undertake the role, noting that:

“councillors are not entitled to any resettlement grant whatsoever. I think that is a huge risk for, particularly, younger members with caring

⁹⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 215

⁹⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 110

⁹⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 344

responsibilities, families, people who are giving up employment, careers to be a councillor.”⁹⁷

141. The WLGA view is that:

“the powers need to be there for the independent remuneration panel to allow some sort of resettlement grant, just as AMs, MPs have.”⁹⁸

Our view

142. The lack of a resettlement grant for those who are not re-selected is of concern and could pose a barrier for some wishing to stand for election. We believe that consideration should be given to how this could be addressed to ensure there is parity between councillors and other elected representatives who do not retain their seat.

5. 5. Four term limits and incumbency

143. The issue of incumbency was highlighted to us as a barrier to increasing diversity. The Fawcett Society has for some time recommended a four-term cap for local councillors. This has since been supported by the ERS. In the Fawcett Society’s report, *Does Local Government Work for Women*, data shows that men are generally in office longer than women.

“For those who have been a councillor for less than a year, the ratio is about the same, but those who have been in for one to four years the ratio has already dropped to seven women for every ten men. [...] By the time we get to those who have been in office for more than 20 years, there are only four women for every ten men.”⁹⁹

144. ERS Wales referred to incumbency as “seat-blocking”, noting:

“While parties may put an emphasis on selecting more diverse candidates to stand in vacant seats, it is those that have been held by the same person for years where a lack of diversity will persist.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 135

⁹⁸ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 136

⁹⁹ [Fawcett Society, Does Local Government work for Women? – Final report of the Local Government Commission, July 2017](#)

¹⁰⁰ [Written evidence, DLG 22, ERS Wales](#)

145. Councillor Debbie Wilcox told us that at the 2017 local government election of the 895 incumbents who stood for election, 693 of them were successfully re-elected. Councillor Wilcox explained:

“Incumbents are more likely to be re-elected than other candidates. It could be a mixture of profile, reputation, track record. And because most councillors are older white men, successful incumbents are therefore older white men.”¹⁰¹

146. However, Councillor Wilcox also noted that after the 2017 local election, 45 per cent of councillors were newly elected. The data of councillors who responded to our survey showed that around two thirds had served two terms or fewer.

147. The suggestion of introducing a cap had mixed responses from witnesses. Both WEN Wales and Chwarae Teg were generally supportive of four term limits. The Chief Executive of Chwarae Teg believed that a four-term limit would result “in a more dynamic picture in local government”,¹⁰² while the Director of WEN Wales noted:

“in my own experience, there are plenty of white, male, slightly older councillors who will not move and give up their seats and they’re in the winnable seats.”¹⁰³

148. The Conservative and Labour Party representatives thought that term limits are artificial, with the Labour representative noting that:

“you will lose a lot of expertise that has been built up over a period of time.”¹⁰⁴

Our view

149. We acknowledge the evidence that incumbency disproportionately benefits men and that men holding on to safe seats limit opportunities for a more diverse

¹⁰¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 151

¹⁰² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 125

¹⁰³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 124

¹⁰⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 226

pool of candidates and members. Despite this, we were not persuaded by the suggestion of introducing a limit on the number of terms a person can be elected.

150. We are also aware that it can take a significant amount of time to build up knowledge and expertise as a councillor, and believe that enforcing a rule to not allow experienced members to stand again could have a detrimental impact on the effectiveness of local democracy. We believe that, ultimately, the choice should be left to the local electorate, and should they wish not to re-elect a standing member, they can do so by voting for another candidate.

6. Programmes and Schemes

We heard evidence on the various programmes and schemes that have been run in recent years with the aim of increasing the diversity of individuals who stand for local government election.

6.1. Mentoring and leadership schemes

Diversity in Democracy programme and mentoring

151. The Welsh Government established the Diversity in Democracy programme, which ran from 2014 to 2017. The aim was to increase the diversity of individuals standing for election to local government through a number of measures, including:

- providing mentoring support for future candidates;
- publicity campaigns to raise the profile of the work of local government and its members; and
- an exit interview scheme with councillors standing down at elections to determine the reasons for their decision.

152. Having taken part in the programme as a mentor, Councillor Debbie Wilcox told us:

“our view is that too much emphasis has been placed on mentoring. Now, mentoring is a valuable opportunity, but it’s often extremely resource-intensive and offers a low return, because it’s a significant personal commitment, as I found, as a mentor.”¹⁰⁵

153. Some witnesses questioned the value of the programme, with only a small number of participants being mentored standing for election. The Head of Policy at the WLGA told us:

¹⁰⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 139

“The conversion rate from mentees into actual candidates, into actual councillors, certainly from the diversity in democracy campaign, was a little disappointing.”¹⁰⁶

154. Councillor Debbie Wilcox explained that of the 51 mentees who participated in the Diversity in Democracy programme, 16 progressed to being candidates and four were elected at the last local government election.¹⁰⁷

155. The Director of ERS Cymru questioned the “amount spent” on the Diversity in Democracy Programme, and whether:

“there could be better measures put in place to really encourage women and people from different ethnicities to really come forward and stand.”¹⁰⁸

156. The Head of Policy at the WLGA noted that the organisation wanted to learn lessons from the evaluation currently being undertaken on the programme and would be:

“keen to lead and certainly work with political parties, the Welsh Government, One Voice Wales and other partners. Local democracy campaigns are key vehicles. It’s usually only a week of events. []So, as part of a WLGA campaign, we’d certainly be looking at campaigns throughout the year to try and just refocus people, because 2022, the local elections, are a long way off, so we just need to start warming people up gradually before people really consider putting their nomination papers in.”¹⁰⁹

157. Whilst being supportive schemes that include mentoring, the Director of ERS Cymru noted:

¹⁰⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 56

¹⁰⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 140

¹⁰⁸ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 279

¹⁰⁹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 142

“there’s only ever going to be limited impact to those schemes, and unless you take stronger measures across the board, they’re only ever going to be limited.”¹¹⁰

158. The Chief Executive of Plaid Cymru commented that it was important to understand why many of those who participated in the programme did not stand for election:

“I know that Plaid Cymru members have been on the diversity in democracy scheme and that they’ve appreciated it greatly and found the support very valuable. But, I think, essentially, there’s a need for answers from those people who didn’t stand for election in 2017, and that the programme should ask them for their reasons for not standing.”¹¹¹

159. The Chief Executive of Race Council Cymru did not believe that the Diversity in Democracy Programme had been effective in increasing the number of ethnic minority candidates:

“it didn’t really make any difference. We haven’t seen evidence that many BME people came through that process and were successfully elected or stood for office or even tried.”¹¹²

160. Moving forward, the Deputy Chief Executive of One Voice Wales suggested that community and town Councils could be seen as training grounds where potential local authority councillors could gain valuable experience:

“we think that community and town councils could be the place where the target should be, because that is the training ground for councillors who may want to become county borough councillors and maybe Assembly Members.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 269

¹¹¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 197

¹¹² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 69

¹¹³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 59

161. The Head of Policy at the WLGA also suggested that more use could be made of shorter term shadowing opportunities, which is considered less resource intensive:

“encouraging shadowing, just one-to-one discussions with certain councillors or even officers about what the role entails, some of the issues, some of the benefits of it—and then, if they really are interested, align them with a mentor.”¹¹⁴

Leadership programmes

162. We also heard evidence on schemes run by a number of other organisations to encourage greater diversity of people standing for local elections, including schemes run by Chwarae Teg, WEN Wales and Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Network (EYST).

163. Chwarae Teg run LeadHERship, a national campaign which provides young women with an opportunity to learn about Welsh politics at a local government level, and gain first-hand experience from inspiring role models within public life. We heard from its Chief Executive that, despite the appetite to participate in the scheme, a longer term plan is needed:

“we’re only able to make a small impact with a small number of people. And that’s important; it’s not to do down the value of that. But we don’t have any comprehensive scheme or longevity that would lead to the kind of systematic or systemic change that we need.”¹¹⁵

164. The Director of WEN Wales told us of its mentoring scheme:

“It’s got mentoring, which is a one-to-one relationship between the mentor and mentee. It’s got training, so we put on days like media training, dealing with the media, social media resilience, how to respond to bullying and harassment, public speaking [] And the third part of it, which is incredibly important [] is peer-to-peer support. So, that is the women supporting each other, and myself and Chrissie, the mentoring scheme project manager, supporting the women.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 56

¹¹⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 68

¹¹⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 66

165. We heard that 26 women had participated in the WEN Wales scheme during its first year and that the women had progressed in different ways:

“Some of them have become trustees, some of them have put themselves forward to be governors of local schools, a couple of them are going to stand and have put themselves forward for selection. But I think what we have to be careful of with these schemes is, often, people aren’t immediately going to stand. It’s about building their confidence, and certainly some of the feedback we’ve had is that women who’ve been mentored have got increased confidence. []It’s a more long-term thing. We’ve just got to keep on with it, and keep going with our cohorts every year.”¹¹⁷

166. The Chair of the Cardiff and Vale Local Party for the Welsh Liberal Democrats told us of her experience of getting involved in politics after participating in a development programme, and stressed the importance of such schemes reaching out to people from all backgrounds:

“I actually got involved in politics through a programme that Women Making a Difference ran a few years ago, Engendering Change—some people may be aware of that programme. That programme used to bring out women from all different backgrounds, and, to some extent, the current programmes, I feel, lack that. I had no intention of going into politics at that point and here I am, sitting in front of you, as a councillor. So, they can be very effective, but it’s important that they reach out to everyone and to people of all diverse backgrounds and all political followings too.”¹¹⁸

167. The Women’s Officer for NUS Wales also emphasised the benefits of mentoring and shadowing:

“Mentoring and shadowing are both really good things. I’ve really benefited from having mentors. [] I think it can be really useful for giving people an opportunity to see what they can achieve. I always say that, if you can’t see it, you can’t be it, and I think it just takes that one person to point out the skills that you have and what you have to offer. So, I think if someone was mentored by a councillor, a young person, if

¹¹⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 67

¹¹⁸ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 200

you partnered them up, they would really benefit from that, and that relationship would help them see that they could become that one day.”¹¹⁹

168. The Chief Executive Officer of Race Council Cymru called for specific targeted funding to deliver political leadership training for ethnic minority women:

“What is needed is specific funding which Race Council Cymru’s hoping to work with Operation Black Vote to deliver in Wales. Specific, empowering leadership, coaching and mentoring, and coaching for performance is what we’re looking at, where individuals are empowered within themselves to find strategies to overcome the negativity.”¹²⁰

Our view

169. We commend the work that has been and is currently being undertaken, by all stakeholders to offer under-represented groups opportunities to develop their skills and confidence with the aim of encouraging their participation in public life. All of these schemes play an important role in supporting people to understand how they can make a difference in their local communities, but some of the evidence we heard questioned their effectiveness in advancing diversity among local government representatives.

170. We are aware that the Welsh Government is currently evaluating its Diversity in Democracy Programme, and believe that the lessons learnt from delivering that programme will be important in framing the focus of future schemes. We await the Welsh Government’s report with interest and will return to this issue when the report is available.

171. Whilst we commend the individual schemes run by various stakeholders, we believe there should be better evaluation of the effectiveness of these schemes across Wales.

Recommendation 15. We recommend that the Welsh Government commissions a review of all publicly funded mentoring programmes to assess their effectiveness, including value for money.

¹¹⁹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 314

¹²⁰ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 15

Recommendation 16. We recommend that the Welsh Government, following an evaluation of publicly funded programmes, looks at the possibility of establishing a national leadership programme, building on the experience of Chwarae Teg Women’s Equality Network and others to encourage more people from under-represented groups standing for election.

6. 2. Education system

172. Education was a key theme in the evidence received, with a focus on schools, but also youth and community groups in raising young people’s understanding and involvement in politics. Councillor Debbie Wilcox told us:

“Education, obviously, is key here. I would strongly advocate a clear pathway for learning in our schools and particularly as we’re looking to—you know, there’s a move towards voting at 16.”¹²¹

173. We heard that engagement is seemingly ad-hoc and dependent on local leaders showing interest in the subject. The Joint Acting Chief Executive of Youth Cymru noted that levels of participation in schools was good five years ago, but that the funding reductions to both statutory and voluntary youth services have resulted in:

“an eroding of how participation is enabled amongst the young people that they work with, how they don’t have youth forums to the same extent.”¹²²

174. The Director of WEN Wales shared the belief that there is a need to:

“get political education into schools to start the process off early.”¹²³

175. We were told that the proposals to extend the vote to 16 and 17 year olds provides new opportunities to engage with young people, with the Women’s Officer for NUS Wales noting:

¹²¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 69

¹²² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 302

¹²³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 56

“votes at 16 would be absolutely fantastic for this, but with votes at 16, I think there needs to be education and citizenship lessons in schools so that we’re engaging young people from a really early age.”¹²⁴

176. The Director of ERS Cymru shared the view that “political education for young people is relatively easy, because they’re in a classroom”,¹²⁵ however, she cautioned against revolving this around school councils, as:

“there’s a risk that these will only attract the brightest who are already engaged in politics.”¹²⁶

177. We heard that one of the recommendation in ERS Cymru’s Our Voices Heard Report, which was co-written with year 9 pupils across Wales, called for statutory political education lessons with a minimum expectation of one hour each fortnight.

178. Another recommendation from that report was that mock elections should be held across Wales at the same time as the Assembly elections. The Director of ERS Cymru told us of the experience in Norway:

“In Norway, there is a mock election that takes place for all young people between the ages of 11 to 18, and it happens on the same day as their actual election. Then, on the tv in the evening [] you get the young people’s results. It means that politicians actually pay attention to what young people think, and it shows that what they’re doing is really meaningful.”¹²⁷

Our view

179. We are very interested in measures to raise political awareness among young people and hopefully encourage them to participate in public life. We are concerned by the evidence we heard in relation to reductions in funding to youth services and the detrimental impact this has had on youth participation. Settings

¹²⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 283

¹²⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 203

¹²⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 265

¹²⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 262

such as youth forums play a key role in facilitating young people's contribution to public life and often provide a route into local politics.

180. We heard that the proposal to extend voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds for Welsh elections will enhance the opportunities to engage with young people. Should the vote be extended, it should be accompanied by a national programme of political education for young people to ensure they are able to fully engage in the process. We understand there may be concern among teachers with regard to teaching young people about politics, but believe the Welsh Government should look at how the new curriculum can ensure consistent delivery of active citizenship lessons across Wales and ensure teachers are able to provide the information young people need.

181. We are also interested in the recommendation made by ERS Cymru in relation to holding mock elections for young people at the same time as Assembly elections. We realise that consideration would need to be given however to the details around how a mock election would work in practice and the age groups participating, but believe that these should be explored by the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 17. We recommend that in the forthcoming local government bill, the Welsh Government includes provisions to roll out an adequate level of political education across schools in Wales. Young people from the ages of 14 and 15 should receive this education, particularly should proposals to extend voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds be implemented. This programme of political awareness should be accompanied by clear lesson plans to empower teachers to deliver the lessons.

Recommendation 18. We endorse the recommendation made by ERS Cymru that a national mock election for young people which should be held at the same time as Assembly elections. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers how this can be implemented.

6. 3. Access to Elected Office Fund

182. We heard that *Access to Elected Office Funds* already exist in England and Scotland to assist disabled people to stand for election. In England, grants of between £250 and £40,000 are provided to help disabled individuals put themselves forward for election, while Scotland provides financial support to pay for the additional impairment related costs that disabled people face when running for elected office.

183. No such fund currently exists in Wales, with the WLGA suggesting it may not have been possible under the previous devolution settlement. The Head of Policy told us:

“I don’t think that could be rolled out in Wales at the time because the Assembly didn’t have competence over electoral matters, I think. So, that might have been the issue at the time. But going forward, obviously you’ve got further powers now, so you should, if you so wish and if the Welsh Government funds it, be able to provide that support in future elections.”¹²⁸

184. There was widespread support in the evidence for such a fund in Wales, the Senior Associate from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) told us:

“something that we’d certainly like to see is an access to elected office fund. At the moment, we have access to elected office funds in England and in Scotland, so I think it’s really important that we don’t fall behind in Wales in providing that support.”¹²⁹

185. The Director of WEN Wales suggested that such a fund could be wider in reach to help other under-represented groups:

“Funding needs to be made available to help under-represented groups get into local government, like an access-to-elected-office fund.”¹³⁰

186. The Minister acknowledged that standing for election can be expensive and that “people aren’t going to come forward if they can’t afford to do that”. She stated that she is “extremely interested” in testing the Welsh Government’s powers in this regard, adding that it was “actively looking” at whether a fund could be created for people wishing to stand for election in Wales.

Our view

187. We are concerned by the lack of an Access to Elected Office fund in Wales as this could provide essential assistance to individuals who wish to stand for office

¹²⁸ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 146

¹²⁹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 108

¹³⁰ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 5

but are prohibited by the financial costs. This is a particular concern for disabled people and those from poorer backgrounds. We acknowledge that the Minister is eager to test whether such a fund can be established in Wales and believe that the Welsh Government should determine whether this is possible.

Recommendation 19. We recommend that as a matter of priority, the Welsh Government establishes an Access to Elected Office fund in Wales to assist disabled individuals run for elected office. The possibility of extending such a fund to support other under-represented groups should also be explored.

7. Electoral system and quotas

While some progress has been made in recent years, particularly in parliamentary and Assembly elections with quotas, twinning or all-women shortlists introduced, the limited success at local council level is still a matter of concern.

7. 1. Quotas

188. Several witnesses supported introducing some form of quotas, particularly around gender. The Vice-president of the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Service (CWWYS) was of the view that if quotas existed:

“it would certainly drive progress forward in areas where it needs to happen.”¹³¹

189. The Chief Executive of Chwarae Teg also supported introducing quotas, and referred to the pattern over the last four rounds of local government elections in Wales since 2004:

“if you look at female candidates, we’ve gone from 22 per cent to 28 per cent in that time, and every election, we’ve fielded more women. And where women are selected and stand, they’re quite successful at getting elected. So, you know, most women who stand for election in local government get elected, but we won’t get to 50/50 on the current trend until 2073.”¹³²

190. The Director of ERS Cymru concurred:

“I really do think that without a blunt tool like quotas, you’re never going to see parties truly make steps towards taking action on this issue.”¹³³

¹³¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 353

¹³² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 38

¹³³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 232

191. Not all witnesses were convinced that quotas are the way forward. The Conservative, UKIP and Liberal Democrat representatives believed that it is the pool of candidates that is the issue, and encouraging a broader range of individuals to stand should be the target.

192. The Boundary Review Director for the Conservative Party told us:

“The party chairman nationally has set a target of trying to get a 50/50 balance on the list. And I think what is most important is to increase the pool of women candidates—I think that that is where the barrier is.”¹³⁴

193. The Regional Officer for UKIP Wales commented:

“We think it’s not necessarily something that can be manufactured as such, but the more information that’s out there for what it means to be in local government and in other institutions, the better, and if that’s more women, and more people from different backgrounds, then all the better.”¹³⁵

194. We heard from the Minister that her personal view was:

“given the rate of progress, if we don’t quota it, we are going to be a thousand years before we get any kind of better diversity.”¹³⁶

195. However, the Minister also warned of potential unintended consequences with quotas, and therefore careful consideration should be given to the practical issues that might arise.

Our view

196. The evidence presented to us is clear. Despite being around half the population, the percentage of women standing and being elected as local authority members is far from the level it should be. Despite attempts to encourage more women into politics, these have not had the desired effect. It is

¹³⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 137

¹³⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 143

¹³⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 9 January 2019, paragraph 194

clear that such a change will not happen naturally, therefore action is needed to address this imbalance.

197. We did not receive specific evidence in relation to quotas for other under-represented groups, however this should be considered in more detail in conjunction with quotas for gender.

7. 2. All-women shortlists

198. The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 amended the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to allow political parties to use all-women shortlists to select candidates for parliamentary elections; elections to the European Parliament; elections to the Scottish Parliament; elections to the National Assembly for Wales; and most local government elections.

199. There was some support for all-women shortlists among witnesses, with the Leader of the WLGA, Debbie Wilcox noting that she is a:

“great advocate for all-women shortlists and quotas and so on and so forth, because otherwise it wouldn’t happen.”¹³⁷

200. The Chair of Welsh Labour’s Organisation Committee noted that there was:

“a fairly good record inside Welsh Labour of having all-women shortlists to give that boost to get us to where we want to be.”¹³⁸

201. We heard from Plaid Cymru that it’s work has already started to increase the number of women candidates the 2022 local election. Its standing orders have been changed to ensure equal candidacy in target constituencies.¹³⁹

202. Neither the Welsh Liberal Democrat or Conservative representatives agreed with the principle of all-women shortlists. The Chair of the Cardiff and Vale Local Party for the Welsh Liberal Democrats stated that more work should be done to:

“make women realise the importance that they would be contributing by taking on those roles, and then supporting them through. Welsh Liberal Democrats have had women leaders []and we haven’t done

¹³⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 November 2018, paragraph 163

¹³⁸ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 178

¹³⁹ [Written evidence DLG 20, Plaid Cymru](#)

that by any women shortlists or anything, but by recognising and supporting talent. That's something that I firmly believe in."¹⁴⁰

203. The Boundary Review Director for the Conservative Party told us:

“as a party, we would be against all-women shortlists. If there's an all-women shortlist because the three best candidates for the final shortlist are all women, that's fine, and that's often happened in the party, but it must be on the basis of merit, and it demeans women, in my view, to think that they're not there on their total ability.”¹⁴¹

204. The provision that allows all-women shortlist has a *Sunset Clause*, which comes to an end in 2030, having been extended from its initial date of 2015. The Chief Executive of Chwarae Teg emphasised her concern should the sunset clause not be further extended:

“if the sunset clause comes in in 2030 and all-women shortlists are stopped before then, then we're absolutely stuffed. Now, that would require legislation at a UK level, but there are, I think, things that we can do in Wales and commitments that parties can make to extend that. But it won't happen by accident; it has to be committed to.”¹⁴²

Our view

205. We realise that not all political parties favour all-women shortlists. However, we do not believe the change needed to increase the level of women in politics will happen naturally. Generally, women face greater barriers to becoming elected representatives than men; therefore positive action is needed.

206. Should the Sunset Clause which allows all-women shortlists come to an end in 2030, this option will no longer be available to political parties. Some political parties have used all-women shortlists and it is important that this option remains available to them.

¹⁴⁰ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 204

¹⁴¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 206

¹⁴² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 39

207. It is clear that insufficient progress has been made in increasing the number of women in politics, therefore we believe that the Sunset Clause should be further extended to 2050.

Recommendation 20. We recommend that the Welsh Government makes representation to the UK Government in favour of extending the Sunset Clause in the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 be extended to 2050 to allow the continuation of all-women shortlists.

7. 3. Post-election pastoral care

208. Some of those providing evidence had experience of standing for election or had previously been a councillor. One issue that was raised was the lack of post-election pastoral care and mentoring support from political parties to candidates after losing their seat or failing to be elected.

209. The Director of WEN Wales had previously stood for election, and shared her experience with the Committee:

“So you’ve had the party around you, supporting you, helping you, you’re out every night canvassing, you’re at every meeting, and then you lose. You get some very nice messages on WhatsApp and a couple of phone calls the next day, and then you’re on your own...there is no pastoral care.”¹⁴³

210. The Chief Executive of Chwarae Teg noted that the lack of pastoral care seemed to constitute a “missed trick by the parties”.¹⁴⁴

211. The political parties accepted, on the whole, that there was more to do in terms of providing pastoral care. The Labour Party representative supported this view, stating that the party:

“could be doing more to assist individuals who find themselves, in effect, out of a job after an election.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraphs 75 and 77

¹⁴⁴ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 78

¹⁴⁵ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 261

7. 4. Data collection

212. Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 makes provision for political parties to collect data on diversity of candidates. This provision has yet to be enacted by the UK Government.

213. The 2011 Measure requires local authorities to conduct a survey of councillors and unsuccessful candidates following each election. The Measure specifies that the questions asked by a local authority as part of the survey may include information relating to gender, sexual orientation, language, race, age, disability, religion or belief, health, education and qualifications, employment and their work as a councillor. There is not a duty on councillors or unsuccessful candidates to provide any of the information requested.

214. The EHRC and ERS Cymru both told us that it is currently very difficult to measure the diversity of candidates, and to address the situation because the extent of the issue is not known. Both want to see Section 106 of the 2010 Act enacted and amended to include local government.

215. The EHRC, in its report, [Diversity of candidates and elected officials in Great Britain](#), published in March 2019 recommended that the UK Government should bring into force section 106 of the Equality Act 2010.

216. We heard from the Senior Associate from the EHRC there could also be an opportunity in Wales to include requirements on political parties to ask candidates to complete diversity forms on the point of selection:

“I think it would be a missed opportunity if we don’t think about—as we make changes to our electoral systems in Wales, that we don’t build data collection of diversity data into those processes.”¹⁴⁶

Our view

217. We believe that any measures to increase the availability of data on the diversity of candidates standing for election should be fully utilised. We do not understand why this specific provision has not been enacted by the UK Government. We support the collection of this data in Wales, and believe the Welsh Government should consider other options for collecting this information in the absence of new powers.

¹⁴⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 December 2018, paragraph 32

Recommendation 21. We recommend that the Welsh Government make representations to the UK Government regarding the enactment of Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010.

Recommendation 22. We recommend that the Welsh Government assess the effectiveness of the provisions in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 in relation to data collection, and in relation to other candidate data that could be collected within the current devolution framework.

Annex A: Consultation responses

The following responses were submitted and are [published on the website](#).

Reference	Organisation
DLG 01	Llandough Community Council
DLG 02	Barry Town Council
DLG 03	Ceredigion County Council
DLG 04	Neath Town Council
DLG 05	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
DLG 06	Penarth Town Council
DLG 07	Women's Equality Network Wales
DLG 08	Monmouthshire County Council
DLG 09	Chwarae Teg
DLG 10	Powys County Council
DLG 11	Race Council Cymru
DLG 12	Unison Cymru Wales
DLG 13	Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales
DLG 14	National Federation of Women's Institutes-Wales
DLG 15	Gwynedd Council
DLG 16	Equality and Human Rights Commission
DLG 17	Cllr Jackie Charlton, County Councillor for Llangattock
DLG 18	Welsh Local Government Association
DLG 19	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
DLG 20	Plaid Cymru
DLG 21	One Voice Wales
DLG 22	Electoral Reform Society Cymru
DLG 23	Principle Youth Officers Group
DLG 24	Youth Cymru
DLG 25	Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services
DLG 26	Roger Pratt
DLG 27	Welsh Labour

Annex B: Schedule of oral evidence

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. [Transcripts](#) of all oral evidence sessions are available.

Date	Name and organisation
21 November 2018	Councillor Debbie Wilcox, Leader, Welsh Local Government Association Daniel Hurford, Head of Policy, Welsh Local Government Association Siân Williams, Head of Democratic Services, Conwy County Borough Council Paul Egan, Deputy Chief Executive, One Voice Wales Jessica Blair, Director, Electoral Reform Society Cymru
5 December 2018	Cerys Furlong, Chief Executive Chwarae Teg Catherine Fookes, Director, Women's Equality Network Wales Uzo Iwobi, Chief Executive, Race Council Cymru Paul Hossack, Senior Associate, Equality and Human Rights Commission Mike Payne, Chair, Organisation Committee, Welsh Labour Gareth Clubb, Chief Executive, Plaid Cymru, Councillor Bablin Molik, Chair of the Cardiff and Vale local party, Welsh Liberal Democrats Tom Harrison, Regional Officer, UKIP Wales Kathryn Allen, Vice-President, Voluntary Youth Service Steve Davis, Service Manager, Principle Youth Officers Group Julia Griffiths, Joint Acting Chief Executive, Youth Cymru Chisomo Phiri, Women's Officer, NUS Wales
9 January 2019	Julie James AM, Minister for Housing and Local Government Lisa James, Deputy Director, Local Government Democracy, Welsh Government Angharad Thomas-Richards, Electoral Reform Programme Adviser, Welsh Government

On Balance:

Diversifying Democracy in Local Government in Wales

Report of the Expert Group on Diversity
in Local Government





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Foreword



Local government provides front-line services to the public which are vital for their everyday lives. Whether it is the schools our children attend, the social care on which our elderly relatives rely, the roads and pavements on which we drive, cycle or walk, the parks, leisure centres or libraries which we frequent, or the collection of our domestic waste and recycling, we are all dependent to a greater or lesser extent on our local councils.

This makes it vital that the people who make decisions on our behalf about all of these matters are in tune with and representative of their local communities. Unfortunately, when taken as a whole, this is clearly not the case currently for local government in Wales.

There is no County or County Borough Council in Wales in which both sexes are equally represented. More often, women make up between 20 and 30% and sometimes less. The average age of councillors in Wales is around 60 and has remained stubbornly within that range for many years. The number of non-white councillors is miniscule even in areas of Wales with relatively large numbers of BME citizens.

On top of this, we have far too many councillors elected without a contest, and more generally, the number of people who vote at local elections is disappointingly low.

This is not simply a matter of equality principles – important though that is – but the critical need for council chambers to be filled with representatives who have a range of diverse life experiences and different aspirations. That is unlikely if the profile of local government remains overly uniform.

The work of the Expert Group has run in parallel with that of the Commission on Public Service and Delivery, chaired by Sir Paul Williams (“the Williams Commission”)¹. It appears likely that its recommendations will lead to a reduction in the number of councillors and councils in Wales. If that comes to pass, it will be crucial that the proposals in this report are put into effect to ensure that improving diversity is a major factor influencing the selection of candidates to new councils.

I was very proud to be appointed as Chair of the Expert Group established by Lesley Griffiths (Minister for Local Government and Government Business) to examine the issues above. I hope that this report, and its recommendations, will serve as a springboard to bring about significant change in the types of people putting themselves forward for election at the next local elections, both at county and

¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/improvingservices/public-service-governance-and-delivery/report/?lang=en>

community level. We also need to ensure that different candidates are elected because diverse councillors will revitalise our local councils and drive their future direction as a vital tier of governance for our small nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. McAllister'.

Professor Laura McAllister
Chair, Expert Group on Local Government Diversity

Introduction

In May 2013 Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business, successfully moved the following motion in the Assembly:

To propose the National Assembly for Wales:

Appreciates the necessity of advocating efficient open, transparent and accountable local democracy and the importance of encouraging greater diversity and stakeholder engagement in Local Government.

Welcomes the Welsh Government's eventual commitment to facilitating live streaming during all council scrutiny and cabinet meetings.

Calls on the Welsh Government to bring forward a comprehensive agenda that will tackle issues around openness, transparency and accountability in local democracy and local government.

Calls on the Welsh Government to confirm its support for devolving responsibility for local government elections to the National Assembly.

Regrets that around 77,000 16 and 17 year olds in Wales are currently denied the vote and believes that democratic accountability would be strengthened by allowing 16 and 17 year olds to vote in elections to local councils.

During the plenary debate², the Minister said:

“When the survey results were published, I also stated that I would make a further announcement on my plans to build on the work already under way to broaden participation in democracy. Today, I am pleased to announce that I intend to establish an expert group to consider the results of the survey in detail, take evidence from interested groups, and set out a plan of action for the Welsh Government and political parties to ensure that, between now and 2017, we collectively do our best to encourage greater diversity in local government.”

² http://www.assemblywales.org/docs/rop_xml/130514_plenary_bilingual.xml#83588

Following this, the Expert Group on Diversity in Local Government was established by the Minister for Local Government and Government Business in July 2013. The Minister requested that the Expert Group review the results of the Local Government Candidates Survey (a survey of successful and unsuccessful candidates at county and community elections in 2012), consider any ways in which the survey itself and response rates might be improved and to more generally examine the profile of local government with a view to making recommendations on improving diversity in local government at the 2017 local elections.

The Expert Group's full terms of reference are at **Annex 1**. The biographies of members of the Expert Group are at **Annex 2**.

The lack of diversity in council chambers across Wales has been an issue of some concern for many years. Traditional dominance by older, white males was probably reinforced by the effect of the local government reorganisation of 1996. The merging of previous county councils with the various district, borough and city authorities in Wales brought about a competition for candidacy before the first elections to the new counties. In many cases, the existing county councillors were successful in being adopted as candidates. These tended to be older, well-established members of their political groups with strong support in their local party branches. Younger, less experienced district, borough or city councillors often lost out. It is commonly perceived that the outcome, therefore, was an older and even more male-dominated profile than previously.

There is concern about the profile of local councillors for a number of reasons. The proportion of the workforce which is female and the slowly increasing number of women achieving positions of seniority in public and private institutions is not reflected in local government in Wales. Neither, outside of some excellent examples in a few local authorities, has there been a reflection of the younger age profile of Members of the National Assembly for Wales and the UK Parliament, and Ministers in the Welsh and UK Governments.

However, perhaps most importantly, if people perceive that local government is dominated by older white males (as it is in many areas), this can serve to further alienate voters who are already difficult to enthuse as reflected in voter turnout and, indeed, all political activity.

As Williams puts it (page 174, paragraph 5.49)³:

Diversity is not simply about gender or ethnic diversity; it is about different voices, not just different characteristics of people. People in senior positions, on Boards and at the head of organisations often share many characteristics, and therefore a common way of thinking can be inherent in the system. the public service leader of the future will need to have a different range of skills from the leader of today; they will need to embrace new and innovative approaches and will need to lead on a systems basis. We believe that a lack of diversity would hinder this improvement.

Following the establishment of the National Assembly in 1999, a number of public events were arranged between Welsh Ministers and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) in the early 2000s, often aimed at under-represented groups, with the cooperation of their representative organisations. Two more organised interventions took place in the second half of the 2000s.

Step Up Cymru

Following an Assembly Member shadowing scheme managed by Operation Black Vote in 2007, the Step Up Cymru Pilot Scheme was a partnership between the National Assembly for Wales, the WLGA and the Welsh Government.

The scheme ran between October 2009 and April 2010 and provided 34 participants from across Wales with an opportunity to shadow and be mentored by a Councillor or Assembly Member over a six-month period. The aim of the Scheme was to increase participants' involvement with democratic bodies and develop their roles as active citizens and community ambassadors. Step Up Cymru was also designed to raise awareness amongst elected politicians about the barriers that people who considered themselves to be from under-represented groups might face.

³ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dpsp/publications/psgd/140120-psgd-full-report-env2.pdf>

A number of participants decided to stand for election at the 2012 local elections and the evaluation report⁴ illustrated a significantly heightened political consciousness and confidence amongst participants.

The “Expert Panel”

The Councillor Commission Expert Panel Wales was established by the Welsh Government in March 2008 to examine the recommendations of the “Councillors Commission” - in turn established by the UK Government to review participation in local government in England - and to consider more broadly the barriers to participation in local government in Wales and make recommendations to Welsh Ministers.

This was a relatively large body (13 members) including councillors, business representatives, political party officials, trade union and equalities representatives. Chaired by Sophie Howe, it published its report “Are we being served?”⁵ in November 2008.

The report contained 35 recommendations, including ones dealing with equality monitoring of councillors, publicity campaigning, training and development for councillors, political education in schools, family absence for elected members and remuneration. Not all were aimed at the Welsh Government; some were aimed at local government and were the subject of updates from the WLGA.⁶

Many of the recommendations of the Expert Panel led to the policy issues addressed through the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (“the Measure”).

⁴ http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/about_us-commission_assembly_administration/equalities/step-up-cymru.htm

⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dsjlg/consultation/090814reporten.pdf>

⁶ http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CDIQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wlga.gov.uk%2Fdownload.php%3Fid%3D3548%26l%3D1&ei=GRDVUq-NJuS57Abo_4DQAq&usq=AFQjCNGWdjVzOM_odNPgcWHqXa5DLkFVOQ

The Measure⁷

The Measure was introduced to the National Assembly in order to put into primary legislation policies which had developed from a variety of sources. Prior to 2009, these had been difficult to address because of the lack of legislative powers vested in the Assembly. Parts 1 and 2, in particular, had their roots in the report of the Expert Panel. Most of these provisions were unique to Wales:

a) Survey of candidates

The Measure introduced a requirement on “Principal Councils” (the 22 city, county and county boroughs) to conduct a survey of all elected councillors and unsuccessful candidates at both county and community council level. They were charged with collecting the returns and forwarding the data to the Welsh Government for analysis. The questions to be answered were designed to reveal candidates’ personal characteristics and employment backgrounds in order to build up a profile of those elected and those standing for election to local government. The survey is due to be repeated following each ordinary local election in order to develop longitudinal data. (see below for details of the report).

b) Remote attendance

This was designed to make it possible for councillors in employment or with caring responsibilities to attend council meetings that they would otherwise be unable to. This allowed for the first time a council meeting to take place in more than one location. This is an enabling provision, which has not yet been commenced – but is likely to be during 2014 – whereby a remotely attended meeting can only take place if the council’s standing orders allow for it. At meetings of the WLGA’s networks, it has become clear that some councils are already making preparations to push ahead with this reform, while others have been less enthusiastic (at time of writing).

⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/4/contents/enacted>

c) Annual reports

The Measure requires all Principal Councils to ensure that arrangements are in place to publish annual reports by any councillor who wishes to do so. Although not under a compulsion, indications are that most councillors will in fact do this, so as to show to their electorate the range of duties they perform and their level of involvement with local initiatives. It is a policy aimed at improving engagement and also providing interested members of the public with a better picture of what it means to be a councillor.

d) Timing of council meetings

After each ordinary local election (i.e. for the full council, not a by-election), each Principal Council is required to survey their members to assess the best times to hold council meetings. The policy was designed to make councils take account of those councillors who might have difficulty with existing timings.

e) Training and development

The Measure requires all Principal Councils to make available to their members a “reasonable” level of training and development. “Reasonable” is defined in guidance as being that required to achieve the WLGA’s Members’ Development Charter⁸. The concept of an annual personal development plan for councillors is also introduced and has been put in place by several authorities. Information from the WLGA is that at least 15 out of 28 local authorities (county councils, fire and rescue and national park authorities) carry out personal development reviews with their members.

f) Democratic Services

Each principal council is required to designate one of their officers as the Head of Democratic Services (HDS), whose job, in brief, is to ensure that adequate support is provided to councillors to perform their duties. Every council must also have a Democratic Services Committee (DSC), which carries out the designation of the HDS and, in general, reports to the council on the support provided to councillors. The DSC must be chaired by an opposition councillor.

⁸ <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/member-development-charter>

This policy was designed to provide councillors outside the leadership – the executive/cabinet – with a lever to help to ensure that the council provided acceptable levels of support for member services, as well as organising scrutiny and other committees.

g) Family absence

For the first time, councillors in Wales are entitled to maternity, paternity, and various other types of leave associated with the birth or adoption of children. Up until the Measure, the absence of a councillor was treated only in a negative fashion, i.e. if they failed to attend a meeting in six months, they were deemed to have vacated their seats. The Measure gives a clear entitlement to a councillor with a new child to take time off from council duties for up to six months. Having only been brought into effect late in 2013, it is too early to know how widely this entitlement will be taken up and any material impact it makes.

The 2012 Survey of Candidates

The survey⁹ resulted in a total of 3,201 responses (around 35%) from 21 local authorities (Anglesey's elections were postponed until 2013¹⁰). Most of the results can be seen in the table on page 15, which compares results with other surveys conducted in other parts of the UK.

The survey confirmed the severe under-representation of female councillors and candidates both at county and community level and the dominance of the over-60 age group.

It should be noted, however, that there was significant change in some councils in terms of the age and gender split. Both Monmouthshire and Powys saw their

⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/local-government-candidates-survey/?lang=en>

¹⁰ *The local government elections on the Isle of Anglesey were held in May 2013. The elections were conducted on new electoral boundaries, the size of the council reduced from 40 to 30 and the pattern of electoral wards changed from single to multi member. All 30 seats were contested by 107 candidates, 19 being female. Of the 19, three were duly elected to the council. The results of the survey of candidates will be published by the Welsh Government in 2014.*

average age fall. Newport had more female members than ever before, at around 40%. Swansea claimed the youngest cabinet member anywhere in the UK at 22 years of age.

There had been previous surveys of councillors (at county level only – and not including unsuccessful candidates) carried out on behalf of the Local Government Association, with separate analyses for Wales provided to the WLGA. In 1999, this showed that, in Wales, 19.5% of councillors were female. That figure rose to 21.8% after the 2004 elections¹¹. There was no Welsh disaggregation carried out after the 2008 elections but the BBC¹² carried out their own research which suggested 22% of councillors were women. So the figure of 28% in the survey results for 2012 does represent some progress¹³. That percentage will be slightly depressed by the Anglesey results, with only three women elected out of a total of 30 members, meaning an advance of, at most, some 8 percentage points in 13 years. At that rate of progress, there would be no equal representation until another 35 to 40 years have passed.

Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRP)

The IRP¹⁴ has existed since 2008 and, since the approval of the Measure, has had power to determine what members of local authorities get paid. Although it is unclear to what extent remuneration is a driver, the Panel is in a position to make use of the remuneration framework in ways which might help to reduce financial barriers for people standing for election to local government. However, current economic circumstances make it difficult for them to make major adjustments.

For several years, members of principal councils who need to care for a dependent child or adult have been eligible for a care allowance, up to a maximum of £403 per month. There is, however, anecdotal evidence, mainly from the IRP's visits to local authorities, that some potentially eligible councillors resist claiming their entitlement.

¹¹ www.wlga.gov.uk/uploads/publications/932.pdf

¹² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/7337718.stm>

¹³ The Electoral Reforms Society's figure is 26%.

¹⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/irpwsb/home/?lang=en>

There seem to be two deterrents. Firstly, other councillors may raise doubts that the allowance is really necessary, often on the grounds that they have managed to care for dependants without a specific allowance. Secondly, the publicity given to remuneration received by councillors after each municipal year acts as an incentive to minimise claims, especially in the current economic climate.

During the IRP's visits to local authorities in Wales in 2013, councillors expressed concern that these factors combined to create feelings of guilt in the minds of eligible councillors, and hence conflicted with the aim of the care allowance - to encourage those with dependents to participate in local government.

Access to elected office

The "Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund" was set up in 2012 by the UK Government's Equalities Office and runs until March 2014. The fund offers individual grants of between £250 and £20,000 to disabled people who want to be considered for selection as candidates for an election, or are already planning to stand for election.

The grants are intended to help meet the additional support needs that a disabled person may have that are associated with their disability.

The fund is available to those who are eligible to stand for office under the requirements of electoral law, can provide evidence of disability, and have had some previous involvement or interest in civic, community or other relevant activities.

In Wales, the fund covers elections to the UK Parliament and Police and Crime Commissioners. The Welsh Government is likely to consider whether to run a similar scheme in Wales following an evaluation of the UK Government's scheme.

Youth mayors and cabinets

A number of county councils have established informal youth mayors and cabinets. This forms part of an initiative, supported by the British Youth Council,¹⁵ to ensure that young people are empowered to participate in decisions which affect them. This subject was addressed with a particular degree of seriousness in the Vale of Glamorgan¹⁶.

It should be noted that some community councils have taken the opportunity to co-opt youth representatives, as enabled by the 2011 Measure. Councils could also consider whether they might participate in initiatives such as the “Youth on Boards” programme.

Youth on Boards

In the summer of 2013 a **Women Making a Difference** project selected a group of promising young people who were looking to take their volunteering to the next level to participate in a new and innovative programme. They trained over 15 young people aged between 18 and 25 in the skills and knowledge required to become Board Members or Trustees.

This project, jointly funded by GwirVol and British Council Wales was open to young people from all over Wales, and participants came from places including Swansea, Cardiff, Newport, Milford Haven, Port Talbot and the Vale of Glamorgan.

The training and experiences offered to the young people included governance training, media training, confidence building and a visit to the Senedd and Pierhead hosted by the National Assembly Outreach Team. These young people were then offered the opportunity to experience what it is like to be in public life by sitting as observers on boards and being mentored by experienced board members. There have been some promising examples with young people on the boards of the British Council in Wales and Sport Wales for example.

¹⁵ <http://www.byc.org.uk/uk-work/young-mayor-network.aspx>

¹⁶ http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our_council/council/minutes,_agendas_and_reports/reports/scrutiny_11/2013/13-01-21/youth_cabinet_and_mayor.aspx

Evidence Gathering

Evidence from previous research

By way of context to our Expert Group review, we conducted a thorough literature search. This helped add important detail to the information gathered from our call for evidence. Allen,¹⁷ showed how women were more likely than men to drop out of local government and, indeed, to then drop out of political activity altogether. It might be assumed that this indicates a turn-off provided by the male domination of politics, the antagonistic approach, as well as the busier domestic lives often led by women. Other research seemed to suggest that the only way to break through this was to establish a critical mass of female representation, normally deemed to be over 30% of the total number, such as that, achieved in the National Assembly.

The “Welsh Power Report: Women in Public Life”¹⁸, produced by the Electoral Reform Society (ERS), is the most recent comprehensive look at the number of women in political life in Wales. Published in March 2013, it highlights the complete absence of women Police and Crime Commissioners, that only 14% of chairs of health boards are female, only 18.5% of Welsh MPs are women, only 21% of Dyfed Powys Crime Panel, Snowdonia National Park and the Mid and West Fire and Rescue Authority are female. Very similar data was included in the Equalities and Human Rights Commission’s 2012 update report “Who Runs Wales”¹⁹, indicating the scale of the challenge that still exists across most parts of civil society.

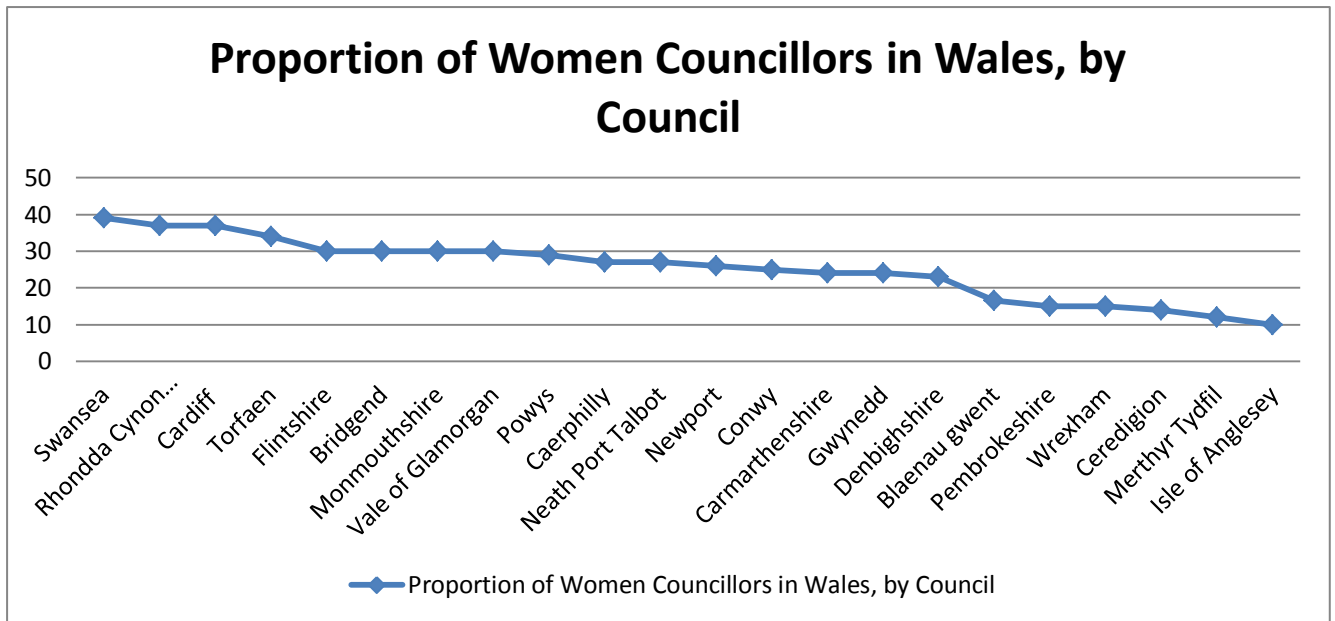
The report lists the proportion of women in each of the 22 Principal Councils. Swansea has the highest female membership of 39%. Six councils have less than 20% female membership. That even the highest figure is significantly less than 50% shows how much ground there is to be made up in Wales. At least it is no longer possible to argue that ex-industrial areas fare worst in gender equality. Although Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent still languish at under 20%, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Torfaen, Flintshire, Bridgend, Caerphilly, and Neath Port Talbot all have more than 25%, while the cities of Swansea, Cardiff and, to a lesser extent, Newport, have

¹⁷ [Allen, P. A.](#), 2013. Last in, first out – Gendered patterns of local councillor dropout. *British Politics*, 8 (2), pp. 207-224.

¹⁸ <http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/images/dynamicImages/welshpowerENG.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/wales/library/who-runs-wales-2012-update>

“relatively” healthy proportions (37.5%, 36% and 26% respectively). The evidence also shows that poor gender balances are more likely in rural authorities with a higher than average proportion of independent councillors. Anglesey, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Denbighshire, Gwynedd and Carmarthenshire all have less than a quarter female members (Wales has the highest proportion of Independent members at Principal level in the UK).



Of course, the situation is not confined to Wales. It is not simply a question of equality. Wängnerud & Sundell²⁰ found that women in elected office contribute to improving the situation for women compared to men when it comes to income levels, full-time employment in the public sector, and distribution of parental leave among parents.

At the Scottish local elections in 2012, according to Kenney and Mackay,²¹ fewer than 25% of candidates were women. The number of women elected to Scottish local councils has plateaued over the last few years at about 22%.

Figures produced by Hall, one of the members of the Expert Group, comparing relevant surveys, showed that Wales, with its estimated 28% female membership

²⁰ “Do politics matter?: Women in Swedish local elected assemblies 1970-2010 and gender equality in outcomes”

²¹ <http://genderpoliticsatedinburgh.wordpress.com/2012/04/18/more-of-the-same-women-and-the-scottish-local-government-elections-2012-5-2/>

lagged behind England with 31% (rounded) and Scotland (30.4%) but was above Northern Ireland (24%). Welsh councillors are slightly older. Minority ethnic communities are severely under-represented in all the countries. There appears to be a fairly common proportion of around 15% disabled councillors, although it is unclear to what extent this is age-related.

Table of Comparative Survey Data

	Wales	England	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Gender				
Male	72%	68.5%	69.6%	76%
Female	28%	30.6%	30.4%	24%
Age				
18-29 years	2.1%	2.4%	3.2%	7%
30-39 years	4.7%	5.3%	6.7%	10%
40-49 years	11.3%	11%	16.6%	20%
50-59 years	25.4%	21.9%	28.3%	27%
60-69 years	38.8%	40.3%	38.2%	25%
70-79 years	17%	19.1%	6.7%	9%
80+ years	1%		03.%	
Ethnicity				
White	99%	96.3%	96.6%	100%
African			0.6%	
Asian			1.3%	
Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	1%	3.6%	1.6%	
Religion		NOT ASKED		
Christian	83%		49.9%	100%
Other	2%		4.3%	
None/no reply	15%		45.6%	
Sexual Orientation				NOT ASKED
Heterosexual	97%	84.2%		
Gay or lesbian	3%	3.3%		
Bisexual				
Other	<1%	0.3%		
Prefer not to say		12.2%		
Married/same sex civil partnership			72.3%	
Employment Qualifications				
None	10%	9%	5.4%	16%
'O' level GSCE/NVQ 1 /2	25%	12%	9.0%	16%
A level/ NVQ 3	10%	13.6%	12.2%	12%
NVQ4 or above	54%	55.9%	55.8%	44%
Professional qualification/other		8.3%	17.6%	11%
Employment				

Full/part time employment	31%	30.5%		60%
Unemployed & seeking work	2%	1.7%	4.5%	
Self employed	19%	14.6%		
Permanently retired	44%	47.2%	59.9%	29%
Full time education			1.1%	
Permanently sick/disabled			1.7%	
Looking after family or home	4%		5.6%	
Other		6%	27.1%	11%
Health				
Very good			46.2%	
Good	82%		42.7	
Fair	15%		9.2%	
Bad			1.9%	
poor	4%		0	
Long term illness/disability		14.1%		14%
Parental responsibility				
Child under 17	14%	12.4%	20.7%	19.0%

Highest educational qualifications of councillors, 2012

Qualification level	Community councillors	Principal councillors
NVQ 4 or Equivalent (Degree, professional qualification)	51%	54%
NVQ 3 or Equivalent (A-level)	9%	10%
NVQ 1 or 2 or Equivalent (GCSE, O-level, CSE)	25%	25%
None of the above qualifications	14%	11%

Source: Local Government Candidates Survey 2012
(Community councillors, n=2311; Principal councillors, n=449)

The Local Government Candidates' Survey covered community councils as well as the county level. Differences at the local level include a preponderance of independent members of community councils (54%) with Labour (17%) being the second largest political group. They are slightly more likely to be female, according to the results, at 32%. This may reflect the greater convenience and more limited hours of duty associated with this level of local government. Amongst party groups

on community councils, the Conservatives perform best, with 35% female membership. The age profile and ethnic make-up differs little between community and county. With only 1% of community councillors declaring themselves to be lesbian, gay or bisexual, it does appear that the county level, with 3%, is more representative of these identities. It is, however, appreciated that the self-declaration responses may have resulted in an underestimate of this characteristic.

Political parties' initiatives

Chaney, Mackay and McAllister²² showed how the number of women elected to the National Assembly from 1999 onwards had begun to change the style of and approach to politics in Wales, a dynamic referred to as the move from 'descriptive representation' to 'substantive representation'. They show how positive action in two of the main political parties had led to the improved representation of women. In 1999, Labour used a bold policy of "twinning", by which women were guaranteed candidacy in 50% of winnable seats.

In the first Assembly election, Plaid Cymru placed women at the top of regional lists for the Assembly elections, to ensure more women were elected. Both policies were controversial within the two parties but delivered material improvements in the number of women AMs elected.

To date, the other two parties have not used positive action. The Welsh Liberal Democrats have formed a Welsh Diversity Action Group, bringing together various equality groups within their party. They will study the results of the Local Government Candidates Survey as part of preparing their strategy to increase diversity at the 2017 elections.

They highlight childcare availability, the timing of meetings and the atmosphere at male-dominated council meetings as three major barriers to women's involvement. However, they are offering guidance and support to new candidates through "Inspiration Days". On top of this, they are hoping to try and identify and eliminate

²² <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/3023/>

“unconscious bias” in the selection process. They do not, however, support quotas or other forms of positive discrimination in favour of under-represented groups.

Plaid Cymru felt that the general lack of knowledge about the role of a councillor and the general attitude towards elected politicians was the biggest deterrent to engagement. They feel this is best tackled through political education for young people, as part of the curriculum. They also propose direct engagement with organisations representing disadvantaged group. Disabled people, for instance, may be put off by the costs and logistical difficulties associated with running a campaign – as well as after election.

Plaid also believes that a Proportional Represented System would provide more opportunity to favour diversity through Party lists.

Welsh Labour, in the lead up to the 2012 elections, made an explicit commitment to increase the representation of women in local government and required local parties (on a local authority basis) to draw up clear plans as to how this should be achieved.

Local plans led to significant improvement in some areas but Labour believes that to deliver a stability of representation over election cycles (which is vital to progression into senior and leadership roles) women must be represented in more than just marginal seats.

The party also stated that feedback from women members suggested that the demands of local government representation were not compatible with working and/or family commitments. They claim to have examples of well-qualified women choosing not to put themselves forward for selection due to their family commitments and their belief that the commitment of being a candidate and a councillor would not be compatible with other responsibilities

Labour felt that practical measures to support councillors with family and caring responsibilities are needed, as is a different culture and expectation that it is possible to be an effective representative and meet wider commitments. They believe that continued support and progress is needed to enable more women to take on senior roles in local government and for all parties to celebrate and laud this progress.

Labour also point to support and encouragement given to potential BME candidates and while the overall number of these is low as an overall percentage it represented a significant increase on previous levels. They say that this base of increased representation will be used to try and further increase membership from across the BME communities and to continue to increase representation in local government and in other areas of representation.

Our own evidence

The Group wrote to numerous relevant individuals and organisations in September 2013 (**see Annex 3**), informing them of the purpose of the Group and asking them to submit views on how the Candidates' Survey might be improved and how it might obtain more responses. We also asked what they saw as the main barriers to diversity in local government and what might be done in order to overcome them.

A total of 20 responses were received and the respondents are listed in **Annex 4**. In summary, the main issues raised were:

1. Improving the survey

A common response was that the Survey did not address the issue of persons who considered candidacy – or may have done – but decided against standing and that these people also merited surveying in order to identify their reasons for eventually not putting themselves forward or being selected as a candidate. The survey is primarily intended as a longitudinal exercise, comparing the cohorts at different elections, with the effectiveness of policy towards diversity being exhibited in potential changes to each cohort. However, supporting research into the factors deterring candidacy would be very useful.

In its evidence, Plaid Cymru suggested that candidates should be questioned on what encouraged them to stand. It was also proposed that benchmark data (i.e. the results of the 2012 survey) should be made available to recipients of the next survey form, in order for them to better understand the purpose of the research.

Finally, some respondents proposed broadening the research around the survey by adding telephone or face-to-face interviews. This would have the advantage of

providing qualitative data to enhance the survey, but would also add to the cost. It also does not relate to the main aim of the survey – to see change over time – which may only be fully appreciated as the surveys are repeated.

However, such an exercise could have the benefit of improving response and identifying role models, whose case studies could be published on-line as part of an exercise to attract interest from potential future candidates.

Increasing the response rate

There was a strong preference for the survey to be conducted on-line. This, combined with the issuing of the survey at the time of registering nominations, rather than post-elections, might serve to increase response rates and probably improve the quality of data because it would avoid the possibility of disinterest following the election results.

It might be necessary to amend legislation to achieve this, as the Measure specifies that the survey will take place after the elections. Distributing the survey, whether electronically or not, before the elections would mean accessing information which, strictly speaking, belongs to the Returning Officer rather than the local authority, and the Assembly currently has very limited competence in relation to the Returning Officers. However, there is time to consider how these improvements might come into effect, seeking a legislative route if required.

Engaging with local authorities or their leaders in order to encourage response might well become easier the second time around. The first survey needed to be organized very soon after the enactment of the Measure with little time to win “hearts and minds” of elected members and officers.

Finally, it was obvious from the responses in different local authorities that engaging the Local Government Data Unit to undertake the survey on their behalf had had a positive impact. Using professional researchers and statisticians has clear advantages, particularly in issuing reminders, for instance, to increase response rates.

Using the Survey

It was clear from the responses that little thought has yet been given as to how local authorities themselves might use their local results. However, there were indications that this might change in future. Now that the focus had been shifted to the non-executive councillor through the Measure, with its Democratic Services Committees, data could be useful in the preparation of Equality Plans. Flintshire Council said as much in their evidence to the Group.

The way the results of the survey have been presented might also be improved. Much of this will be achieved by having two distinct surveys – one for County candidates and one for community candidates. But this can be improved by further distinguishing between those who are elected and not elected. By doing this a longitudinal change in candidates and those who are elected could be brought out.

Where numbers of responses allow for it, the survey data could also be further drilled down. As political parties are such an important variable when it comes to participation it might be useful, for instance, to breakdown gender and BME levels by political party to see the variation which, in turn, might be used to identify good party practice, while prompting parties with poor gender/BME representation to assess their own profile and position.

2. Addressing barriers to participation

Much more valuable information was provided when respondents were asked to think about the causes of under-representation and what might be done to address the problem. Time commitment is clearly seen as a major issue, either because of domestic/caring responsibilities or employment. There is evidence from other national surveys, notably the English councillor survey of 2010, that councillors from BME backgrounds have the greatest level of caring responsibilities (30.5% of relevant respondees).

Many women do not feel it is possible to balance their responsibilities with that of councillor duties, similarly, many in work do not think they could obtain sufficient time off. Better publicity of the law in relation to employment rights, the availability of care

allowance, the need for councils to survey their members as to the best time for holding meetings and the introduction of remote attendance could all help to tackle this.

More than anything, the perceived lack of interventions by political parties to ensure a wider slate of candidates from under-represented groups, particularly women, in winnable seats, is regarded as a major barrier. On top of this, the negative portrayal of councillors – and other politicians – by the media is considered to be a major turn-off. Link this with a generally lower level of confidence and self-esteem and the shortage of role models, and it is unsurprising that there is a shortage of candidates from under-represented groups coming forward.

Finally, remuneration issues were often mentioned. On the one hand is the stigma existing in the public mind these days concerning the pay of politicians (which is considered particularly unhelpful when trying to encourage take-up of care allowance) and on the other the inadequacy of the income received by a councillor to tempt people to commit themselves to several years as a councillor at some professional and personal cost.

Good practice in addressing diversity

It was clear from the responses that many felt that political parties should make increased and more effective efforts to improve diversity by selecting candidates from under-represented groups..

Senior members of Plaid Cymru have engaged directly with members from under-represented groups to establish and operate a mentoring system. The party has also tried advertising openly for candidates, with the aim of recruiting new blood, most particularly from under-represented groups.

In the run up to the next elections, Welsh Labour intends to restate its commitment to substantially increased women's representation in local government and to introduce robust internal mechanisms and procedures to deliver it.

Some reported that the remuneration framework now in place across Wales had – despite some claims to the contrary – led to younger candidates standing because of the degree of certainty provided about their income from councillor duties over the term of the council. This needs to be coupled with the provision of full information to potential candidates as to their entitlements and what to expect from becoming a councillor, as provided in the WLGA’s candidate guide.²³

The success of shadowing schemes, most notable of which has been Step Up Cymru (see above), had led to those from under-represented groups deciding to put themselves forward for – and in some cases achieving - candidacy to the council or National Assembly. Organisations like Women Making a Difference²⁴ consciously aim to try and prepare women for positions in public life and it is to be hoped that these will feed through to local government positions.

Since 2012 there has been a welcome increase in the number of women and younger councillors appointed to cabinet positions in local authorities. This helps to create more positive role models.

What might widen participation?

The final question asked consultees to put forward their ideas as to what might improve diversity. Responses included best practices such as: targeting initiatives at under-represented groups in various ways. Strongest of all, though, was the recognition that many of the answers lay in the hands of political parties, if they were prepared to commit themselves to a positive promotion of certain candidates. This is likely due to the low representation of independents in many parts of Wales, with little culture of candidates standing outside a party banner. This puts the main political parties in a pivotal position.

In particular, including several female candidates in a party list for winnable multi-member electoral wards could make a significant difference if pursued.

²³ <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/be-a-councillor-candidates-guide-welsh-local-elections-2012>

²⁴ <http://www.womenmakingadifference.org.uk/>

Themes from the Evidence

From time to time, the point is made that the sheer weight of male councillors in local government can be off-putting for women. More diverse representation might lead to more effective decision-making affecting local communities.

In many ways, the political structures introduced through the Local Government Act 2000, replacing the committee system with the cabinet process, laid stress on roles which might come more comfortably to female politicians. The removal of the decision-making powers, to a large extent, from full council and large committees (by placing them with the cabinet) should serve to diminish the opportunity for adversarial politics. The increased stress on the questioning role of scrutiny, often requiring cross-party cooperation, together with the emphasis on councillors' ward work as "community champions" should make life less fulfilling for the traditional councillor who enjoyed the "rough and tumble" of the council chamber. It is more common to hear complaints at the ineffectiveness of scrutiny from councillors who enjoyed the committee system in the past.

The IRP visited all 22 Principal Councils (as well as national parks and fire and rescue authorities) in their 2013 roadshow. They have pointed out that there were only two female leaders of councils and 4 female deputies. 34 female councillors held cabinet posts but in four authorities there were none.

What the Panel did note was the increased number of younger candidates in some authorities. Swansea had the youngest cabinet member in the UK and Ceredigion had a council chair still in his twenties. Swansea's leader had allowed councillors (from the majority group) to apply for leadership positions, with CVs and interviews as in a normal application process and this had worked in favour of some younger and female candidates: promotion on merit, rather than "the old boy's network".

The more councils are able to put councillors from under-represented groups in positions where they can become role models – and the more they are used for interface with the public, the more likely it is for new entrants to follow in their footsteps. The following examples from two members from Neath Port Talbot Council show what might be achieved.

SUZANNE PADDISON

My road to election started with my membership of a political party. I became active within my constituency, helping out with campaigns for AM's, the MP, the referendum on The Welsh Assembly, and the Police and Crime Commissioner Election. I did these over a period of several years. During this time I was asked if I would like to become a school governor. I was recommended as a suitable person by a Councillor and was appointed to a local primary school. After two years the Chair of Governors resigned and I was approached by the Head teacher to ask whether I would consider standing. This I did and was subsequently elected. I held office as the Chair until the School closed as part of the Local Authority's Strategic School Improvement plan. This was a very interesting and rewarding experience and helped me when I sought selection to become a candidate in the local elections. Many people in the locality already knew me through my school connection.

I had not intended to seek elected office. The local A.M just asked me whilst out delivering leaflets one day if I had ever considered becoming a local Councillor. The seed of the idea had been planted and I reflected on it for some time, until approximately 12 months before the next local government elections were due, I answered a general email that was asking for people interested in standing to attend a fact finding evening. I attended and felt that it was for me. I sought selection, was successful and finally was elected in May 2012. I didn't find being a female candidate put me at a disadvantage in any way. Whilst campaigning, I found the public to be completely open to the idea of female Councillors. I would suggest to any woman thinking of engaging in any form of public life not to be persuaded by fear of the unknown but to 'go for it'.

If I had to give a suggestion as to how society could engage more women to seek elected positions I would say – more women who have already achieved positions need to just ask them if they would be interested. In my case, that was all the encouragement I needed. It seems simplistic but it is easily done. I will do my best to suggest this to any woman I come across.

I recently made a much bigger decision, to stand as a parliamentary candidate after the sitting MP announced he would not be seeking reselection. This was a much harder decision. In this regard I feel that being a woman does make a difference to people. I have been very active within my party since becoming a councillor, I am the constituency campaigns coordinator, but live in an area that is a so called 'safe seat'. Because of this fact many men from outside the constituency are also interested. I do feel that the 'old boy's network' comes into play when fighting for parliamentary seats, more than the local elections. Notwithstanding this I intend to give it my best shot and see what happens. I have had to take a long look at myself and try to convince myself that I am as good a candidate as the men.

Only time will tell if I will be successful at this.

I hope my story, although at this time, unfinished, will inspire another woman somewhere to take that first step forward and – Just go for it.

KAREN ELIZABETH PEARSON

Having worked for many years out of the Glyn Dulais Care Home, in Crynant, as a relief manager with Local Government, I began to develop strong links within the community. At the same time I was the treasurer of Crynant Cubs and Scouts for several years which also gave me an insight into the difficulties faced by many rural families juggling daily life with

work, particularly women, who would often provide me, and each other, with support, and encouragement as well as inspiration.

I decided to run as a County Councillor because like many other families, I have encountered numerous barriers in life, particularly those faced by women, trying to raise a family and develop a career, primarily for financial purposes, which I believe government, especially local government can help with. I also believe that I have the compassion as well as the life skills, necessary to represent the diverse mix of individuals, (even within a small community such as Crynant) and the difficulties they encounter. Although Crynant is seen as a fairly affluent area, many individuals are faced by the day to day influence local government has over their lives, in areas such as social welfare; health as well as education.

A trade unionist since leaving school, with family members actively involved within local politics, I was encouraged to run for County Councillor at Neath Port Talbot, representing the Crynant Ward, which I have for the last 18 months. This situation has in part been helped by my employer, Barnardo's, who have allowed me to continue working, flexibly around their needs. This is a clear sign of the times as employers realise that some of their best employees are women who need to fit their work pattern around their family lives, quite a common practice within the third sector, and one that I believe the private and public sector are moving towards.

There are many barriers faced by rural women, particularly within politics, as this has been the Bastille of men for many years and as a result women are not always taken seriously or given the opportunities afforded to men. However, I can say that my Ward (as have the Labour County Party), has been overwhelmingly supportive and encouraging and without that assistance I would probably not be in politics today.

Although I believe I have made an impact on a local level, considering the short time I have represented the community, I feel I have a lot more to offer at a Regional or National level and hope, like many other women, that I get the opportunity to use my extensive experience and skills to help those that need it most.

Barriers to overcome

The greatest barrier is undoubtedly the general reduction in, and alienation from, political activity. Active membership of the mainstream parties is at an all-time low and this has a number of impacts. If insufficient young people are joining, that means that the membership will age. Lower membership also means a smaller pool to choose candidates from. A low active membership means that meetings will be small, that organizing roles will fall on a small number of people, who may become tired or disillusioned. It also means that fewer young people are growing up in politically active families.

The remuneration available for councillors is something of a curate's egg. The basic salary of £13,175 is relatively low if looked upon as a sole source of income. It is,

however, a reasonable compensation if a councillor's fundamental role is seen (as it is by the IRP), as part-time and the pay might therefore be attractive for a candidate who has alternative income of some kind. However, it is not sufficient to attract people to give up employment, arguably not sufficient to compensate for an impact on their career progression in their main career and not sufficiently above benefits level for someone in receipt of benefits to become totally reliant on the basic salary. In some cases, councillors in receipt of a senior salary may be earning as much through work as a councillor as they were – or would have done – in work. In some cases, as in the case of a leader in a large or medium-sized council, it may be higher than they may have – or been likely to have – received in outside employment. This is reflective of the responsibilities held by councillors in leadership positions. That said, such salaries are not secure, and leaders and cabinet members can be removed from post 'overnight' losing most if not all of their council salary without the protection afforded to other full time politicians (such as AMs or MPs) or indeed redundancy as provided to employees.

With the Williams report pointing towards a reduction in the number of councillors, the IRP may well need to reevaluate the allowances available to councillors.

Some female councillors have, however, expressed the view that the remuneration is an attractive recompense if they can fit councillor duties around their other employment and/or domestic responsibilities.

Remuneration available to councillors includes care allowance of up to £403 per month. This can be of considerable help to members who need to pay for childcare. Unfortunately, as reported by the IRP, claiming it – which is then recorded and publicised as all councillors' remuneration is required to be – can act as a deterrent in itself. There have been well-publicised cases of councillors being accused of abusing the allowance. The allowance by itself does not mean that appropriate childcare facilities are available, of course.

Care allowance is not only claimable by female councillors, of course, and a number of male councillors have indeed claimed it since it was introduced in 2002. There should be no suggestion that this facility, together with the new family absence arrangements, is intended to pigeonhole women as carers. A genuine improvement

in female representation within council chambers is just as likely to include women without dependents, or those whose previous dependents are now adult.

In Scotland, there is no care allowance as such but councillors may opt for a “salary sacrifice” scheme, through which they give up part of their remuneration in exchange for childcare vouchers.

Aspects of the experience of being a councillor can also be off-putting. Many councillors “boast” of being available 24/7 to their electors, called out at all times of day or night. While that might be true – and it may be difficult for a councillor to put off a troubled constituent – the intensity implied is not an encouragement for new people to get involved.

Despite the often self-sacrificing nature of many councillors, it is rare for the media to praise them but all too common for any weakness to be highlighted and condemned.

Successful initiatives

Most councils have appointed a “Members Development Champion” from within the ranks of their councillors. In some cases, these have the role of encouraging new recruits on the council, in a mentoring role. In some councils, their role is more sophisticated. Swansea, for instance, has a range of member champions with the aim of providing a link between the council and particular under-represented groups.²⁵

The Association of London Councils, in advance of their elections in 2010, produced a leaflet “People like You Stand for Election”. This was aimed particularly at minority ethnic groups but more generally at encouraging diversity in the council chamber. This sort of campaign could be repeated in any area.

Since the approval of the Measure, community councils have been able to co-opt young persons in a non-voting capacity to serve as speaking observers on the council. There is nothing to prevent a county council doing the same.

²⁵ <http://www.swansea.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=52702>

Council leaders who have appointed women or young members into their cabinets have created potential role models. While clearly only able to appoint on merit, identifying merit can be approached in different ways. Again in Swansea, the practice employed by the leader following the 2012 elections was to allow any member of the controlling political group to apply for cabinet posts and participate in an interview with the leader and deputy. Adopting this approach, rather than traditional patronage, led to a council leadership including four women and two younger men.

The WLGA produced a booklet at the 2012 elections entitled “Be A Councillor”²⁶ which answered many of the questions which potential councillors might ask about their future role. It was available online during political party conferences and other events and distributed to candidates standing for election to county councils.

The “Be A Councillor” campaign was also run by the Local Government Association in London councils. Steve Reed is MP for Croydon North and said: *“I agree that we need a much more diverse and representative group of councillors representing our communities. We need more women, more young people and more people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. During my time as leader of the opposition in Lambeth, up until 2006, we ran a three-year programme that identified people from precisely those groups, offering them shadowing, mentoring and training, and supporting them to stand as councillors. We were delighted in 2006 when that bore fruit, with the biggest increase in BME representation anywhere in the country that year. That model has been used by all parties in other places but, sadly, it is not yet used everywhere. I commend the LGA for its work, through the Be a Councillor campaign, to extend such models”.*

Clearly, much can be achieved by way of improving the image of local government if councillors see themselves as emissaries into their local community and encourage people to consider following them into local government. In 2007, Blaenau Gwent council ran an event entitled “I’m a Councillor, Get me Out of Here!”

²⁶ <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/be-a-councillor-candidates-guide-welsh-local-elections-2012>

Blaenau Gwent Case Study

Councillor Des Hillman, then leader of Blaenau Gwent Council said: “I’m a Councillor helps to promote local democracy and aims to get young people to ask questions and get excited by politics – after all they are the next generation of voters.”

In 2007 Councillors Gillian Clark, Jennifer Morgan, Haydn Trollope, Stephen Thomas and Hedley McCarthy took part in the contest. The councillors have put a personal manifesto and answered questions on the website www.bigvote.org.uk.

Over 200 young people registered to take part in the ‘I’m a Councillor Get Me Out of Here’ democracy challenge. They asked 463 questions and voted for their choice from among the five councillors to become Blaenau Gwent Youth Champion for 2007. The Blaenau Gwent section of the www.bigvote.org.uk ‘I’m a Councillor Get Me Out of Here’ challenge, supported by the National Democracy Campaign, was the third busiest in the UK.

Councillor Clark, Executive Member for Education and the Blaenau Gwent Youth Champion in 2007 said: “Young people in Blaenau Gwent are the next generation of voters – it is vital that they are engaged in the democratic and political process and take an interest in local affairs. By showing that we listen to them and take them seriously, we can ensure that they will take part in local democracy in the future.”

Since 2012, the Assembly’s Presiding Officer, Dame Rosemary Butler AM has hosted a series of seminars around the theme of Women in Public Life, in which panels of influential women from different sectors were engaged in discussions looking at the barriers to women’s participation in public life.

She has also launched a web portal²⁷ containing details of public appointments in Wales as well as opportunities for appropriate training; and intends to launch a mentoring scheme aimed at women to provide personal development and skills training and role shadowing opportunities.

²⁷ http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/about_us-commission_assembly_administration/abt-presiding-officer/wipl-home/wipl-portal.htm

Conclusions

The candidates' survey

The response rate to the survey undoubtedly suffered from being the first occasion that the Welsh Government, rather than local government's own organisations, had conducted the survey. There were some responses from councillors to Welsh Government suspicious as to the purposes of the survey and at what they considered the intrusiveness of some of the questions. It might be possible to overcome much of the hostility and caution next time the survey takes place (at the time of the next ordinary local elections) by working more closely with local government to explain the benefits of the survey for measuring the success of measures designed to improve diversity.

The response rate might also be boosted by some organisational changes. The initial exercise was a paper exercise from the point of view of the recipients (although the transfer of data between local authorities and Welsh Government was electronic). More and more people are becoming familiar with on-line supply of data and inclusion of a link to an electronic version of the form, or direct e-mail supply where the contact details of recipients were known, would be easier for many.

Even if they are conducted at the same time – which is sensible given that all local elections in Wales normally take place on the same day – it has been suggested that the county level survey and the community level survey should be seen as distinct and analysed accordingly. This should be achievable through administrative methods but could lend itself to a more “personalised” approach, with the covering letter more appropriate to each particular audience.

The first survey was run after the elections had taken place. This was in keeping with the wording of the Measure which introduced the survey. However, it probably led to a high rate of non-response from unsuccessful candidates. It has been suggested that a better response would be generated if forms were distributed at the time of nomination for candidacy. There would need to be some form of identifier which could be used to identify who did subsequently get elected, but this must not be allowed to interfere with the anonymity of the responses otherwise.

A potential difficulty with this approach is that the nomination process can be considered to be the territory of the Returning Officer, not the local authority, and the Assembly has limited legislative competence in relation to the conduct of elections. However, there is time available to try and find a legal or organisational route to achieve this.

It was notable also that response rates were generally better where local authorities had agreed for the Local Government Data Unit to handle the survey on their behalf. There appears to be considerable merit in the idea of using the Data Unit – or another appropriate research body – to conduct the survey across Wales.

In addition, a view was expressed that an attempt should be made to reconsider the survey questions with a view to achieving greater comparability of results with the other councillor surveys conducted in the UK.

It was also suggested that the survey might be enhanced through involving those who considered standing for election but decided against it, in order to assess what deterred potential candidates. There was an additional proposal that the survey should be supported by some in-depth interviews. Neither of these could be built into the survey as provided for in the Measure. It would require a connected but separate qualitative project to be carried out shortly after the survey and would require cooperation from political parties to identify possible interviewees. It would be for the appropriate Minister to decide nearer the time whether this was worthwhile pursuing.

Local authorities have access to the data for their own area. This could be used now, together with other data, by Democratic Services Committees and Equalities Champions within authorities to develop strategies to address diversity issues. A local authority could use the information to help them to target initiatives aimed at encouraging candidacy amongst under-represented groups.

Local authorities could also provide valuable information – to themselves and the political community more generally – if they were to conduct exit interviews with elected members who had decided not to stand for re-election. The WLGA would be well placed to collect this data from local authorities, suitably anonymised, in order to see whether there are any common characteristics of those standing down.

Improving diversity and representativeness

To a greater extent than any other factor, the under-representation of women in political life generally, and local government in particular, has been highlighted as the biggest issue confronting those seeking a council chamber which reflects its electorate. It has long been the case in many parts of the workforce, particularly the public sector, that women make up a majority of employees. Increasingly, women are reaching managerial, including senior managerial positions. And yet, with the singular exception of the National Assembly, there has been nothing like a representative share of elected seats being filled by women.

30% is the target adopted for female representation for women in decision-making positions across the Commonwealth (see below). That is despite the fact that many Commonwealth countries have cultures in which it is very difficult for women to advance as they have in more developed economies, for which 30% is a very ambitious figure. It is not acceptable for a country with long-standing equalities standards and where there should be no barriers to female participation.

The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015²⁸

Democracy is a fundamental value of the Commonwealth. Women's full participation in democracy and in peace processes is crucial for the achievement of sustainable development. A target of no less than 30 per cent of women in decision-making in the political, public and private sectors by 2005 was recommended by the Fifth Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs (5WAMM) in 1996 and endorsed by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Edinburgh in 1997. (page 10)

Governments are encouraged to take action to: (page 29/30)

- i. Increase women's representation to a minimum of 30 per cent in decision-making in parliament and local government by creating an enabling environment for women (including young women) to seek and advance political careers and by other measures such as encouraging political parties to adopt a 30 per cent target for women candidates as part of their manifestos and to provide leadership training for women. Governments who have already achieved 30 per cent should strive for much higher aspirations.
- ii. Review the criteria and processes for appointment to decision-making bodies in the public and private sectors to encourage increased women's participation and representation. This will require explicit investment into institutional capacity.
- iii. Promote standards in the media whereby discriminatory and/or derogatory images and remarks about women are eliminated.

²⁸ <http://secretariat.thecommonwealth.org/files/212371/FileName/GenderPOA2005-2015.pdf>

The Welsh Government has a commitment to seek to introduce a 40% quota for women on public sector boards, inspired by Norway, which has the same quota for company boards.

In addition, the Davies Report on Women on Boards²⁹ made the following recommendation: *All Chairmen of FTSE 350 companies should set out the percentage of women they aim to have on their boards in 2013 and 2015. FTSE 100 boards should aim for a minimum of 25% female representation by 2015 and we expect that many will achieve a higher figure. Chairmen should announce their aspirational goals within the next six months (by September 2011). Also we expect all Chief Executives to review the percentage of women they aim to have on their Executive Committees in 2013 and 2015.*

There is worrying research suggesting that women are more likely than men to drop out of politics permanently if they lose their seats or decide not to stand again. This could suggest that they are put off by a male dominated organisation, with its associated adversarial style of debate. Again, exit interviews conducted by local authorities might help to clarify this.

Once a critical mass of female membership is achieved, though, (and the Assembly is probably the best example of this) the effect can be to alter the nature of debate and discussion towards a more cooperative, reasoned approach. It is highly unlikely, though, that this can be achieved by chance, at least not in the short to medium term. Although Wales has a traditionally high number of Independent councillors, at county level at least the overwhelming majority of elected members represent political parties. Some form of positive action, particularly by political parties is probably required. However it is done, it means female candidates standing for election in what could be termed “winnable” seats. Political parties would benefit from looking at local successes in improving diversity and seeing what lessons might benefit from general application.

There are, of course, other problems with the profile of councillors in Wales. The average age, at approximately 60, is too high. There are insufficient numbers in employment. There are very few young people (under 30 years old) in council

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/women-on-boards-review>

chambers. Although the percentage of disabled councillors might appear to be above average, that is most probably mainly a factor of age. Finally, even though Wales does not, on the whole, have a high density of black or minority ethnic people (4.4% of the population as recorded in the 2011 census), their representation in the city areas is too low and there are only a tiny handful of female BME councillors.

Stonewall Cymru has also expressed the view that the existing age and gender profile of much of local government in Wales creates an environment which is unlikely to attract candidates who are lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) who might otherwise be interested in local politics. Traditional attitudes might also discourage any existing LGB councillors from declaring their orientation.

Although the political parties promote the vast majority of candidates, a wider campaign along the lines of Step-Up Cymru may be required, prior to the next elections, to try and engage with under-represented networks, linking them with councillors to shadow, and hopefully raising their awareness of the possibilities.

Promotion of political education in schools – with visits and talk by councillors – could help to reach young people getting ready to vote and taking an interest in politics more generally.

Member champions – councillors with a particular role to encourage the training and development of councillors – could use their positions as evangelists for local government by trying to identify potential future councillors. Indeed, this role should be adopted by all councillors.

Leaders of councils and political groups on councils can play a vital role by seeking to assist younger – and female – members to advance within their council. For example, including them within the council cabinet, if they have the ability, putting them in deputy cabinet positions as a development role, or to chair or deputy chair positions on council committees, can serve to ready them for leadership positions in the future.

There is considerable ignorance concerning the role of councillors, whether at county or community level. These can vary from a belief that councillors are “in it for

themselves” or, getting paid for doing very little, on the one hand, to a belief that they are constantly on-call 24/7, with no “downtime” for themselves (a belief often fostered by councillors themselves), on the other.

There is certainly need for factual information about the role of councillors, the time commitment likely to be involved, the duties they are expected to fulfil, the remuneration available – including care allowance – and the tax and benefits implications. This should also cover the legal entitlement to time off work, the new family absence entitlements, the possibilities of remote attendance at meetings and the flexibility councils have around the timing of meetings.

Publications like “People Like You” and the recent campaign led by the Presiding Officer and Chwarae Teg, together with Women Making a Difference need to form part of a campaign.

Local government needs to form or use existing links with community organisations to try and encourage their members to consider local government. This could include school governors, residents and tenants associations, sports organisations, those acting for under-represented groups and many others.

Employers could be encouraged to realize the potential benefits to their organisations of having elected councillors within the workforce. As well as contributing to that company’s corporate and social responsibility by helping their local communities, the broader training and development undergone by councillors can be made use of when transferred back to their workplace. Allowing a career break to someone in a senior position in the local council could have significant payback in terms of their personal development during that period.

It is interesting to note that, in its report “Councillors in the Frontline³⁰”, the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee said: “*The Ministry of Defence is giving serious consideration to the ways in which employers can be encouraged to support military reservists. The Department for Communities and Local Government should conduct a similar review. We recommend that the Government consult on how employers can be encouraged to provide support to*

³⁰ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmcomloc/432/43202.htm>

their staff who serve as councillors. Options that might be considered include a kitemark-style recognition scheme and the introduction of a financial incentive scheme”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving response to the survey

- 1. The Welsh Government should work together with local government, particularly through the WLGA and One Voice Wales (OVW), to explain the purpose of the survey and its importance in measuring changes in the diversity of those seeking election and those succeeding in doing so. This should include a highlight report from the first survey so that recipients of the questionnaire can better appreciate its purpose.***
- 2. The Welsh Government should ensure that the next survey questionnaire can be completed and returned on-line.***
- 3. The surveys of candidates at county and community levels should be separated and conducted as two distinct surveys.***
- 4. The Welsh Government should establish a methodology which allows the survey questionnaires to be distributed at the time of handling nomination papers, in advance of the elections.***
- 5. The Welsh Government should agree with local government that a single research provider, such as the Local Government Data Unit, be employed to conduct the survey on behalf of local authorities at the next elections.***

Improving the information from the Survey

- 6. The Welsh Government should compare the question list with those used for surveys of councillors in other parts of the UK and should, as part of a general review of the questions, decide whether to add or amend any to bring about better comparability and consult on those proposals.***
- 7. The Welsh Government should commission research to enhance the next survey aimed at obtaining qualitative data from a sample of respondents as well as interviewing a sample of potential candidates who had subsequently decided not to stand.***
- 8. Local authorities should be required to examine the data for their own area and develop strategies aimed at improving diversity at future***

election, the success of which can be measured through the subsequent candidates' survey.

- 9. Local authorities should be obliged to conduct exit interviews with councillors standing down at an election, to assess the reasons for them doing so. The WLGA/Local Government Data Unit should collect anonymised data from the local authorities and publish a report after each normal election.*

Action for political parties

- 10. Political parties (and local government itself) should make use of mentoring schemes, involving successful female councillors and those elected at other levels, by encouraging them to act as mentors for other potential candidates, engaging with appropriate local networks.*
- 11. Each of the main political parties should be encouraged to develop their own strategies which will result in female members being nominated as candidates in at least 40% of those seats at the next local elections considered winnable by the party concerned. This will be of crucial importance in the light of the Williams review and the likelihood of fewer councillors.*
- 12. Leaders of all of the main political parties should make a public commitment in support of a charter for local government diversity, based on these recommendations, including the 40% target.*

Widening participation in local government

- 13. The Welsh Government should collaborate with the WLGA and equalities groups to establish a shadowing/mentoring scheme in the period two years prior to the next local elections. This could be widened to include town and community councils, in cooperation with One Voice Wales.*
- 14. Local authorities should encourage secondary schools, as part of the "Active Citizenship" goal in the Personal and Social Education Framework, to arrange for local councillors to speak to school students*

about their role. Councillors from under-represented groups should be encouraged to participate in this.

- 15. Community councils should take advantage of the provisions in the Measure to co-opt youth “councillors” in a non-voting role and county councils should consider the merits of adopting similar procedures, including the creation of “shadow” Youth Cabinets. There should be a campaign involving One Voice Wales and other interested parties to promote town and community councils to increase public awareness of their role and as a potential entry road into political life for under-represented groups.*
- 16. Welsh Government should consider the evaluation of the Access to Elected Office project operated in English elections and consider operating a similar scheme for the next local elections.*
- 17. “Member Champions” in each council should be encouraged to play an external role in encouraging greater participation in local government.*
- 18. Every councillor not intending to seek re-election at the following elections should be encouraged to mentor a potential successor candidate for their seat. Democratic Services Committees could oversee this work.*
- 19. The Welsh Government should coordinate a campaign, together with local government and relevant equalities and civic partners, to ensure that national and local promotions take place in the 18 months leading up to the next local elections to ensure that appropriate information is received by the public about local government and that the idea of becoming active in local government is carried into the community. Local and national media should be included within the campaign, in an attempt to combat the negative image of councillors often portrayed in media.*
- 20. In the period between now and the pre-election period described above, a lower level on-going campaign, involving appropriate stakeholders, should be undertaken to ensure that the need to improve diversity in local government remains in the public eye and to maintain contact with networks of under-represented groups. This should include publicity for role models, targeted to reach appropriate audiences.*

- 21. This campaign should also include approaches to employers to facilitate council membership by their employees. Public sector employers, including the Welsh Government, should become exemplars in facilitating their employees becoming and serving as councillors.***
- 22. Private sector organisations, particularly those benefitting from Welsh Government procurement, should be encouraged to support staff wishing to serve as councillors, as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility programmes. The CBI and other employer organisations should be asked to support this aim.***
- 23. Local authorities which do not already broadcast their meetings should commence doing so at the earliest opportunity, as well as making full use of other social media outlets to engage with a wider public.***
- 24. Welsh Government should evaluate the effectiveness of reforms introduced through the Measure to see how effective they have been in achieving the aims of the Expert Panel.***

ACTION PLAN AND TIMETABLE

Recommendation	Timing	Cost
<u>Improving response to the survey</u>		
<p>1. The Welsh Government, local government, the WLGA and One Voice Wales to explain the purpose of the survey and its importance. This should include a highlight report from the first survey so that recipients of the questionnaire can better appreciate its purpose.</p>	<p>Material to be produced in time for distribution with the survey for candidates at the 2017 elections.</p>	<p>Administrative, distribution and authorship costs, likely to be contained within existing budgets.</p>
<p>2. The Welsh Government should ensure that the next survey questionnaire can be completed and returned on-line.</p>	<p>Design and administrative work will need to be completed before 2017 elections.</p>	<p>Minimal costs to be borne within agreed budgets</p>
<p>3. The surveys of candidates at county and community levels should be separated and conducted as two distinct surveys.</p>	<p>As above</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p>4. The Welsh Government should establish a methodology which allows the survey questionnaires to be distributed at the time of handling nomination papers.</p>	<p>Will need to be addressed during 2015/16 to give time for agreement with electoral administrators and possibly amend Measure provisions.</p>	<p>If Measure requires amendment, cost will be borne within existing budgets</p>

5. The Welsh Government should agree with local government that a single research provider be employed to conduct the survey on behalf of local authorities at the next elections.	To be agreed at least one year before the next elections.	No additional cost. Welsh Government already committed to meet costs of survey.
<u>Improving the information from the Survey</u>		
6. The Welsh Government should compare the question list with those used for surveys of councillors in other parts of the UK and should amend to bring about better comparability.	To be completed in 2015 in case of need to amend Measure.	Contained within existing budgets.
7. The Welsh Government should commission research to enhance the next survey aimed at obtaining qualitative data from a sample of respondents as well as interviewing a sample of potential candidates who had subsequently decided not to stand.	Decision required by May 2016 in order for procurement exercise to take place.	c£10-15,000
8. Local authorities should be required to examine the data for their own area and develop strategies aimed at improving diversity at future elections.	Can proceed immediately and again after each elections.	Would need to be contained within existing budgets.
9. Local authorities should conduct exit interviews with	To be conducted in 2016/17 once decisions on	No additional costs to

councillors standing down at an election, to assess the reasons for doing so. The WLGA should collect anonymised data and publish a report after each normal election.	candidacy had been made. Report produced in 2017.	existing budgets.
<u>Action for political parties</u>		
10. Political parties and local government itself should encourage successful female councillors to act as mentors, engaging with appropriate local networks.	Can be implemented immediately.	To be borne within existing budgets.
11. Each of the major political parties should be encouraged to develop strategies which will result at the next local elections in female members being nominated as candidates in at least 40% of those seats considered winnable by the party concerned.	To be implemented in good time for the commencement of candidate selection for 2017.	No obvious additional cost.
12. Leaders of the main political parties should make a public commitment in favour of this target.	To be considered within their responses to the Report.	No cost.
<u>Widening participation in local government</u>		
13. The Welsh Government should collaborate with the WLGA, equalities groups and, if appropriate, the	Programme would operate in 2015 and 2016. Preparatory work required in second half of	Cost of project coordinator,

<p>Assembly’s Presiding Officer, to establish a shadowing/mentoring scheme in the period two years prior to the next local elections. This could be widened to include town and community councils, in cooperation with One Voice Wales.</p>	<p>2014.</p>	<p>administrative costs and expenses. c£30,000 per year for 2.5 years. Sharing of costs possible between participating bodies.</p>
<p>14. Local authorities should encourage secondary schools, as part of the “Active Citizenship” goal in the Personal and Social Education Framework, to arrange for local councillors to speak to school students about their role. Councillors from under-represented groups should be encouraged to participate in this.</p>	<p>To be agreed at each local authority area but can proceed as soon as possible.</p>	<p>To be met within existing budgets.</p>
<p>15. Community councils should take advantage of the provisions in the Measure to co-opt youth “councillors” in a non-voting role and county councils should consider the merits of adopting similar procedures, including the creation of “shadow” Youth Cabinets. There should be a campaign involving One Voice Wales and other interested parties to promote town and community councils to increase public</p>	<p>Should be ongoing campaign following publication of Report.</p>	<p>To be agreed in funding negotiations between Ovw and Welsh Government.</p>

awareness of their role and as a potential entry road into political life for under-represented groups.		
16. Welsh Government should consider the evaluation of the Access to Elected Office project operated in English elections and consider operating a similar scheme for the next local elections.	To follow publication of evaluation by UK Government Equalities Office. Scheme would need to be put in place at least a year before elections.	Demand driven but likely to require reserve of c£10,000.
17. "Member Champions" in each council should be encouraged to play an external role in encouraging greater participation in local government.	For each local authority to pursue following publication of report.	To be borne within existing budgets.
18. Every councillor should be encouraged to mentor a potential successor candidate for their seat.	As above	As above
19. Publicity and educational campaign, involving Welsh Government, local government and relevant equalities and civic partners, to ensure that information is received by the public about local government and that the idea of becoming active in local government is carried into the community	Campaign to focus on 2015/16, in order to arouse interest for 2017 elections.	Expertise to be procured by Welsh Government through inward secondment or fixed term contract .with potential cost of £30,000.Publicity costs

		to be agreed with WLGA and others but likely to be c£40k.
20. On-going campaign, linked to 18 above, to ensure that the need to improve diversity in local government remains in the public eye and to maintain contact with networks of under-represented groups. This should include publicity for role models, targeted to reach appropriate audiences.	To commence in second half 2014 and be ongoing.	Project coordination and administrative costs to be linked with 13 and 18 above. Steering group to be established to oversee work.
21. This campaign should also include approaches to employers to facilitate council membership by their employees. Public sector employers, including the Welsh Government, should become exemplars in facilitating their employees becoming and serving as councillors.	Ongoing campaign to commence in second half of 2014.	As above.
22. Private sector organisations, particularly those benefitting from Welsh Government procurement, should be encouraged to support staff wishing to serve as councillors, as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility programmes. The CBI should be	As above.	As above.

asked to support this aim.		
23. Local authorities which do not already broadcast their meetings should commence doing so, as well as making full use of other social media outlets to engage with a wider public.	For each local authority to consider following publication of Report.	To be borne within existing budgets. (Welsh Government has already provided start-up funding for this).
24. Welsh Government should evaluate the effectiveness of reforms introduced through the Measure to see how effective they have been in achieving the aims of the Expert Panel.	Evaluation of Measure to be conducted during 2014/15.	c£25,000

Expert Group Terms of reference

- a) To consider and analyse the results of the Local Government Candidates Survey 2012 carried out under the provisions of Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.
- b) To identify any improvements to the methodology and content of the survey which could be addressed prior to the next local elections in 2017.
- c) To examine the implications of the survey results as regards the profile of Local Government in Wales.
- d) To take evidence from interested persons and organisations in relation to the survey results and Local Government diversity more generally.
- e) To develop an action plan for the Welsh Government, Local Government, political groups and other stakeholders which can help to design policy aimed at increased diversity and therefore improving the profile of elected members following the 2017 Local elections.

Biographies



Professor Laura McAllister is the Professor of Governance at the University of Liverpool's School of Management and Chair of Sport Wales. She was educated at Bryntirion Comprehensive School, Bridgend and is a graduate of the London School of Economics and Cardiff University where she completed a PhD in politics. Laura was a member of the Richard Commission on the Powers and Electoral Arrangements for the National Assembly which reported in March 2004 and she provided research advice to the Independent Panel on AMs' Pay and Support in 2008-09. She is Honorary Visiting Professor at Cardiff University, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia and the China National School of Administration, Beijing.

A former Wales football international and national team captain with 24 caps, Laura is currently Chair of Sport Wales. Laura is a Board Member of UK Sport and the Welsh Football Trust. She is a Trustee of Stonewall UK and the Institute of Welsh Affairs, as well as a member of the Wales Advisory Committee of the British Council. Laura holds honorary degrees from the Universities of Bangor, Cardiff and Glamorgan (South Wales).



Joy Kent has been the chief executive of Chwarae Teg since January 2013. Before joining the organisation she was the founding director of Cymorth Cymru, an umbrella body for organisations working with vulnerable people and prior to that held policy roles at the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru, the Welsh Local Government Association and Welsh Government.

Joy is also a trustee of the WCVA and a director of WCVA Services. Before settling in Wales, Joy taught at and managed private language schools in Spain, the Czech Republic, Brazil and Egypt.



Dr Declan Hall was until recently a lecturer in Local Government and Politics at the Institute of Local Government at the University of Birmingham and from 2008-12 a member of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales. Dr Hall also has close involvement with councillor remuneration schemes in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. He is now an independent consultant on local government issues.



Naomi Alleyne is the Director of Social Services and Housing within the Welsh Local Government Association, having previously held the post of Director for Equalities and Social Justice. Prior to that, she was employed in the Equalities Unit at the then Welsh Assembly Government working on race equality and asylum and immigration issues. She has also worked within two Race Equality Councils, holding the position of Director in the South East Wales REC.

Dear Colleagues

Expert Group on Local Government Diversity - Call for Evidence

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 contained provisions aimed at strengthening local democracy by removing the barriers and disincentives to standing for local election.

The 2011 Measure requires each county and county borough council in Wales to conduct a survey of candidates and councillors at each local election. The results will assess the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at improving diversity in Welsh local councils and build a demographic profile of those standing and being elected.

The first survey was conducted at the May 2012 local elections across Wales and the May 2013 local elections on the Isle of Anglesey. Of those who stood for election in May 2012, 3021 responded to the questionnaire. The results (except in relation to the Isle of Anglesey) were published by the Welsh Government. A link is attached.

<http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/local-government-candidates-survey/?lang=en>

Following publication of the Local Election Survey Results, the Minister for Local Government and Government Business announced her intention to establish an Expert Group to consider the survey results and related matters and to formulate an action plan aimed at improving the diversity of local government ahead of the 2017 local elections.

A copy of the Minister's statement and the terms of reference can be found at:

<http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2013/lqdiversity/?lang=en>

I have been appointed as Chair of the Expert Group and I am writing to ask you or your organisation to consider submitting evidence in relation both to the Local Government Election Survey and, in particular, the issue of diversity of elected representatives in local government more generally. We are seeking evidence based on your knowledge, experience and expertise, and would also welcome any examples of best practice that you might be able to provide.

You might wish to consider the following questions in framing your evidence:

1. Do you think the Local Government Election Survey could be improved in any way? If so, how?
2. What might encourage a higher rate of response to the Local Government Election Survey?
3. In what ways have you used or considered using the survey results in your organisation?
4. What are the main barriers for under represented groups standing for local government?
5. What good examples of programmes or initiatives that promote, support and enhance diversity in terms of representation have you experienced in local government or elsewhere that might be transferable?
6. What initiatives do you think might lead to increased participation by underrepresented groups (particularly women, young people, employed persons, disabled and minority ethnic groups)

The Expert Group will be looking for some case studies to evidence good practice or where improvements could be made in this area. If you or your organisation would be prepared to take part in a more detailed discussion of your evidence or experience please let us know.

We are required to report to the Minister by Christmas. Given the tight time frame it is regrettable that the usual 12 week consultation period is not practical.

I would be grateful if you could submit your evidence to Christine.Ayres@Wales.gsi.gov.uk by **30 September 2013**.

Respondents to the Expert Group's Call for Evidence

Newport City Council

Carmarthenshire County Council

Electoral Reform Society

Ceredigion County Council

Philip Williams

Penarth Town Council

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Isle of Anglesey County Council

Flintshire County Council

Gwynedd County Council

Vale of Glamorgan County Council

Bridgend County Borough Council

Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales

One Voice Wales

Chwarae Teg

Welsh Local Government Association

Llandough Community Council

Welsh Labour Party

Plaid Cymru

Welsh Liberal Democrats