

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE:

19 July 2021

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

DIVERSE COUNCIL

Reason for this Report

1. To consider the request from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Council for all Councils in Wales to commit to become a Diverse Council in 2022.

Background

2. It is widely acknowledged that equal representation is not only an issue of representational fairness but essential for the quality of policy development and decision making. Decisions will be better when they are taken by people with lived experience of an issue.
3. A significant amount of work has been undertaken in the last decade in Wales to measure and improve the diversity of councils. In previous elections councils have worked hard to encourage underrepresented groups to stand with their own outreach, mentoring schemes and information days. They have done much to improve the support provided for serving councillors and provide them with guidance, development and better working conditions. More recently the WLGA has worked with Councils to support members suffering abuse and harassment.
4. More work is in the pipeline in preparation for the 2022 elections. There is a national communications campaign to encourage people from underrepresented groups to vote, engage with local democracy and stand for office. New mentoring programmes are being delivered with the Womens' Equality Network Wales, the Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales with Stonewall Cymru and Disability Wales also planning to offer mentoring programmes.
5. The Welsh Government and Senedd Commission are working with Councils, schools and youth councils and developing resources to encourage 16 and 17 year olds to get involved and vote. The WLGA has a new "[Be a Councillor](#)" website and, is part of the Pan UK [Civility in public life](#) campaign and are working with Councils to continue to improve the range of support and development provided to members.

6. Despite previous actions and campaigns to increase the range of representation of councils progress has been slow and it is recognised that there remains a lack of diversity in councils.
7. At a special meeting of the WLGA Council in April 2021 a report entitled Diversity in Democracy was considered and has been attached as **Appendix A**. This was a culmination of the work of a cross-party working group which built on the action plans and ambitions of councils and partners.

Issues

8. The WLGA has committed to making a step change in local government diversity at from 2022. The WLGA Council endorsed the Diversity in Democracy report considered at a special meeting WLGA Council meeting in April 2021.
9. The WLGA Council unanimously agreed that all councils should commit to a declaration on becoming 'Diverse Councils' in 2022, to provide a clear, public commitment to improving diversity. The report included an 'outline' Declaration to:
 - Provide a clear, public commitment to improving diversity;
 - Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all;
 - Consider staggering council meeting times and agreeing recess periods to support councillors with other commitments; and
 - Set out an action plan of activity ahead of the 2022 local elections.
10. A letter attached at **Appendix B** was sent from the WLGA to all Group Leaders, Chairs of Councils, Chairs of Democratic Services Committees, Chief Executives and Heads of Democratic Services. The letter requests that all Councils in Wales should commit to a declaration by July 2021 to become a 'Diverse Council' in 2022, to provide a clear, public commitment to improving diversity. The letter refers to the outline Declaration included within the WLGA report. However, it notes that Councils may wish to undertake further action or commitments within their Declarations according to local priorities.
11. Councils' local diversity work will be supported by a national awareness raising, publicity and support through the WLGA and Welsh Government. WLGA officials will be meeting with Heads of Democratic Services to share ideas and approaches to develop local Diverse Council Declarations.
12. The Council already has the ability to:
 - a. **Demonstrate a commitment to a duty of care for Councillors by providing access to counselling services for all councillors**
 - b. **Demonstrate a commitment to a duty of care for Councillors by having regard for the safety and wellbeing of councillors whenever they are performing their role as councillors.**
13. Some of the intentions of the WLGA Council in its letter and report fall within the remit of the Democratic Services Committee and the support provided by the

Democratic Services Team. Some of the activities that the Committee is developing could be mapped to support these intentions and could include:

- a. Assisting in **“Providing a clear public commitment to improving diversity in democracy”** by:
 - providing a “Potential Candidate session to promote awareness of:
 - the functions of the Council’s among local people,
 - how local residents can become a member of the Council and
 - the roles and responsibilities of an Elected Member
 - Working in partnership with Carmarthenshire Council, Welsh Government and Welsh Local Government Association to provide a series of awareness videos to promote Local Democracy across Wales
 - b. Working with councillors and candidates to **“Ensure that all members and candidates complete the Welsh Government candidates’ and councillors’ survey distributed at election time”** by the promotion of these important surveys by Electoral and Democratic Services
 - c. Supporting the opportunity to **“Set ambitious targets for candidates from under-represented groups at the 2022 local elections”** by identifying the demographic profile of existing Councillors. This data could then be used as a benchmark for any target setting.
 - d. **“Work towards the standards for member support and Development set out in the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development”**
14. Many of the intentions contained within the WLGA Council letter and report are not within the remit of this committee and therefore it would be for others to consider how they could support Cardiff to become a Diverse Council. Initial consideration of the WLGA report by the Head of Democratic Services has identified that the following individuals, committees and political bodies may have a role within their scope of responsibility to undertake activities and actions to support any commitment made by Cardiff Council:
- a. Political Group Leaders and Whips
 - b. Chair of the Constitution Committee
 - c. Chair of the Standards and Ethics Committee
 - d. Chair of the Race Equalities Task Group
 - e. Chief Executive / Returning Officer
 - f. Monitoring Officer
 - g. Head of Democratic Services
 - h. Cohesion and Community Engagement Manager
15. Additional partners, colleagues or organisations may be subsequently identified who may be able to further enhance the opportunities for Cardiff Council to develop a comprehensive action plan to support a Diverse Council Declaration.

Legal Implications

16. There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of the report. Legal advice will be provided, as necessary, in respect of any specific actions to be taken to support the Council's commitment to become a Diverse Council.

Financial Implications

17. There are no direct financial implications from this report. The development of an action plan will require consideration and identification of all resources including any financial provision, necessary to deliver the outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

18. The Democratic Services Committee is recommended to:
 - a. note the content of the report and appendices.
 - b. develop an action plan within the Committee's remit and budget to support the Diverse Council intentions of the WLGA Council.
 - c. Approve that the Chairperson writes to Group Leaders/Whips, Chairs of Constitution and Standards & Ethics Committees, Chair of the Race Equalities Task Group, Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and others, to seek support within their scope of responsibility to progress the intentions of the WLGA Council.
 - d. Approve that the Chairperson writes to Group Leaders on behalf of the Committee requesting that they consider developing a collective response which will enable the Council to declare its intentions to become a Diverse Council in 2022.

Gary Jones
Head of Democratic Services
16 July 2021

The following appendices are attached to this report:

Appendix A - Diversity in Local Government Democracy Report for WLGA
Appendix B - Diversity in Democracy WLGA Letter

Background Papers: None