

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO COUNCIL

21 JULY 2021

REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) 'Diversity in Democracy' report and seek Council's endorsement of becoming a 'Diverse Council' and the resulting actions that need to be taken forward to achieve a 'step change' at the 2022 Local Government Elections.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:-
1. **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county.
 2. **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
 3. **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 3.1 The lack of diverse representation in local authorities is a problem that has been recognised for decades. A more diverse democracy and elected representatives who are more reflective and understanding of their communities leads to better engagement with individuals and communities, in turn leading to greater levels of confidence and trust and better decision making informed by a wider range of perspectives and lived experiences.
- 3.2 The WLGA has committed to making a change in local government diversity at the 2022 Local Elections as it is acknowledged that despite previous action and

campaigns, progress has been slow and it is recognised that there remains a lack of diversity in councils. Data shows that in Wales' local authorities:

- 28% of councillors and 29% of cabinet members are women
- Councillors are proportionately older than the general adult population (47% of councillors were aged 60 years or older) and a higher proportion of councillors were retired (31%)
- Only about 1.8% of councillors are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) compared to 4.7% for the Welsh population and few hold senior positions
- 11% of councillors stated that they had a disability, and there remain a range of challenges for disabled people participating in the democratic process.

3.3 The evidence base, barriers and challenges to attracting more diverse councillors were referenced in the WLGA's submission to the Senedd's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee Inquiry into diversity in local government in September 2018. The barriers and challenges can broadly be summarised as:

- Time-commitment and meeting times
- Political and organisational culture
- Childcare and other caring responsibilities
- Public criticism and online abuse
- Remuneration and impact on employment and
- Lack of diverse role models and incumbency

3.4 Much work has been undertaken in the last decade in Wales to measure and improve the diversity of councils. 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 also being delivered with the Womens' Equality Network Wales and Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales. Stonewall Cymru and Disability Wales are also soon to be offering mentoring programmes. The Welsh Government and Senedd Commission are also 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.

4. Current situation/proposal

4.1 The WLGA has committed to making a step change in local government diversity at the 2022 Local Elections. At a special meeting during March, the WLGA Council endorsed its 'Diversity in Democracy report' (attached as **Appendix 1**). The report was the culmination of the work of a cross-party working group and builds on the action plans and ambitions of both councils and partners. WLGA will take forward several actions nationally, as outlined within the report including:

- The launch of the "Be a Councillor" website (already in place);
- Representations made to political parties to take action and make progress;
- Representation to Welsh Government and the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales that councillors should be entitled to 'resettlement grants' should they lose their seat at an election.

- 4.2 At its meeting and through its report the WLGA Council recognised the diversity work already under way locally but called for concerted and ambitious local action. Through its report and resulting actions it asks councils to prioritise action locally, promoting the take-up of members' allowances and progressing 'Diverse Council' Declarations by the summer. The WLGA Council unanimously agreed that all councils should commit to a declaration by July 2021 on becoming 'Diverse Councils' in 2022, to provide a clear, public commitment to improving diversity.
- 4.3 The WLGA Council discussed the merits of positive action and there was support for the use of voluntary quotas in local elections; this is a matter for local groups and parties but where such voluntary approaches have been adopted in the past, there has been significant progress in terms of gender balance. The WLGA Council also unanimously agreed that councils should set targets to be representative of the communities they serve at the next elections.
- 4.4 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 declarations and action plans.
- 4.5 As part of the commitment from Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) to support the Diversity in Democracy agenda, all Members were asked to complete a diversity and inclusion survey during May 2021. The headline figures are outlined below:
- *73% of respondents stated their motivation to stand as a local councillor was to serve the community*
 - *56% of respondents stated they do intend to stand for re-election at the end of their term*
 - *70% of respondents either strongly agreed (26%) or agreed (44%) that Bridgend County Borough Council is committed to ensuring all members, officers and residents are treated with equal dignity and respect*
 - *76% of respondents either strongly agreed (14%) or agreed (62%) that the council is an inclusive place to work for officers and members*
 - *76% of respondents either strongly agreed (33%) or agreed (43%) that people from different backgrounds are readily accepted and made to feel welcome in the council*
 - *58% of respondents either strongly agreed (24%) or agreed (34%) that people at all levels within the council are respected, regardless of their role*
 - *70% of respondents either strongly agreed (18%) or agreed (52%) that there is real commitment within the council to improve performance on equality and diversity*
 - *91% of respondents either strongly agreed (36%) or agreed (55%) that they are comfortable talking about their background and cultural experiences with their colleagues*
 - *76% of respondents either strongly agreed (30%) or agreed (46%) that they are confident appropriate actions would be taken to tackle diversity and inclusion incidents*

- 73% of respondents either strongly agreed (30%) or agreed (43%) that they know where to register complaints regarding discrimination and harassment
- 85% of respondents either strongly agreed (30%) or agreed (55%) that the council has policies that discourage harassment and discrimination
- 73% of respondents either strongly agreed (26%) or agreed (47%) that the council has done a good job providing training programs that promote diversity and inclusion
- 35% of respondents were aged 65-74, 23% of respondents were aged 55-64 and 18% of respondents were aged 25-34
- 82% of respondents stated they do not consider themselves to be disabled.
- 53% of respondents stated their nationality as Welsh and 38% stated their nationality as British
- 94% of respondents stated their ethnic group as white
- 47% of respondents stated their religion was Christian, 41% chose no religion
- 71% of respondents stated their sex as male and 29% stated their sex as female
- 100% of respondents stated that the gender they identify with is the same as their sex registered at birth
- 85% of respondents stated their sexual orientation was heterosexual/ straight.
- 56% of respondents stated their marital status as married
- 70% of respondents stated that they did not have caring responsibilities
- 83% of respondents stated that they did not have children living in their household
- 30% of respondents described their employment status as full time employed and 27% stated retired
- 94% of respondents stated that neither they nor a member of their household were either serving in the armed forces or an armed forces service leaver (veteran)
- 56% of respondents stated they could not speak Welsh at all, 66% of respondents stated they could not read Welsh at all, and 81% of respondents stated they could not write Welsh at all
- 74% of respondents stated they are not able to speak other languages

Attached as **Appendix 2** is the equality information captured as part of the County Borough Census for 2011. The member survey results will support the work to make the Council more diverse, provide a better understanding of the support people may need and help to support equality and fairness.

- 4.6 It is important that BCBC is committed to increasing diversity, which includes tackling the barriers which prevent an individual's active participation in local democracy. It is therefore proposed that the Council commits to being a 'Diverse Council' and makes the following Declaration to meet the required timescales set by the WLGA:

This Council commits to being a Diverse Council and agrees to:

- *Provide a clear public commitment to improving diversity in democracy;*
- *Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all, promoting the highest standards of behaviour and conduct;*
- *Set out an action plan of activity ahead of the 2022 local elections including:*

- *Appoint Diversity Ambassadors for each political group on the Council to work with each other and local party associations to encourage recruitment of candidates from underrepresented groups;*
- *Encourage and enable people from underrepresented groups to stand for office through the provision of activities such as mentoring and shadowing programmes and information and learning events for people interested in standing and official candidates;*
- *Proactive engagement and involvement with local community groups and partner organisations supporting and representing under-represented groups;*
- *Ensure that all members and candidates complete the Welsh Government candidates' and councillors' survey distributed at election time;*
- *Set ambitious targets for candidates from under-represented groups at the 2022 local elections*
- *Demonstrate a commitment to a duty of care for members by:*
 - *providing access to counselling services*
 - *having regard for the safety and wellbeing of members whenever they are performing their role*
 - *taking a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment by members including through social networks*
- *Provide flexibility in Council business by:*
 - *regularly reviewing and staggering meeting times*
 - *encouraging and supporting remote attendance at meetings and*
 - *agreeing recess periods to support members with caring or work commitments.*
- *Ensure that all members take up the allowances and salaries to which they are entitled, particularly any reimbursement for costs of care, so that all members receive fair remuneration for their work and that the role of member is not limited to those who can afford it.*
- *Ensure that members from under-represented groups are represented whenever possible in high profile, high influence roles.*

4.7 Attached as **Appendix 3** is a draft Action Plan which will be updated accordingly ahead of the 2022 Local Elections. The Plan illustrates Welsh Government's overall objectives and a combination of Welsh Government derived actions for local authorities to drive forward and proposed actions that are bespoke to the Council.

4.8 The Democratic Services Committee considered the proposed actions outlined in the WLGA Special Report and the draft Action Plan at its meeting of 24 June 2021. The Committee considered what BCBC can do to raise awareness and promotion of the role of Members, to reduce potential barriers to becoming an Elected Member with the aim of encouraging future candidates from diverse backgrounds to come forward for election. It is acknowledged that whilst the Council can be supportive of the proposed actions outlined within the Action Plan, the electorate will determine the candidate that receives their individual votes.

4.9 Work will need to be taken forward with Group Leaders of the Council to ensure the diversity outcomes are strengthened and achieved.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There will be no effect on the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

- 6.1 The work of BCBC and the WLGA looks to improve the equality and diversity across the County Borough and within the local democracy setting. The more representative of society and diverse Elected Members are the better understanding they will have of the needs of the local community and therefore are better equipped at carrying out their duties and responsibilities.
- 6.2 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act 2010, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there is no significant or unacceptable impact upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report. Ensuring that there are greater opportunities for a more diverse democracy across BCBC links to the goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

8.1 Financial implications

- 8.1 The awareness raising opportunities referenced within the local action plan can be delivered through platforms already available to the Council. In respect of 'resettlement grants' proposed by the WLGA financial implications may be incurred.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that Council endorse the 'Diverse Council' Declaration as set out in paragraph 4.6 of the report.

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Background documents: Diversity in Democracy Data Report