



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

10th MAY 2021

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

INTERIM REPORT OF THE DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY WORKING GROUP

1. PURPOSE FOR THE REPORT

To seek Members agreement to approve the interim report presented by the Diversity in Democracy working group and the recommendations contained within.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To consider the work of the Diversity in Democracy Working Group as outlined within its interim report
2. To approve the recommendations of the working group as outlined below:

Recommendation 1.

- To work collaboratively with the YEPS Service, Schools and Colleges in the run up to the 2022 Local Government Election to further promote and educate the importance of the youth vote and the democratic process. Utilising the opportunities for engagement and awareness raising and the educating of a 'role of a Councillor' through the welsh baccaulaureate and citizenship lessons within schools.

Outcome: Young people are better educated in the democratic processes, how democracy relates to the provision of Services and the role of a Councillor. Young people have an understanding on the importance of voting.

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Recommendation 2

- To review the effectiveness of the voting awareness raising campaigns following the Senedd Elections and to build upon these campaigns ahead of the Local Government Elections 2022, ensuring wider partnerships arrangements are taken forward to allow engagement with wider audiences.

Outcome: To establish the percentage of first time youth voters who took part in the Senedd Elections and to build upon this number for future elections.

Recommendation 3

- To review the Council Websites 'Democracy pages' to promote the role of a Councillor with details and videos of local Members, promote how the work of a Councillor links in with everyday services taken forward by the Council and provide details and links of the different tiers of government to assist in increasing the understanding of democracy within RCT and Wales. To ensure that the page demonstrates the features available to Members – such as translation facilities, audio equipment within the Chamber, Hybrid meeting opportunities and promoting reasonable adjustments to prevent any perceived barriers for any future candidate

Outcome: Promoting and educating in respect of the role of a Councillor and the democratic process. Promoting the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Recommendation 4

- To take forward the positive relations and opportunities to work with Town and Community Council's to ensure links with 'Democracy pages' are promoted on own website / social media platforms and for similar local 'role of a councillor' to be developed and promoted.

Outcome: Promoting and educating in respect of the role of a Councillor and the democratic process. Promoting the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Recommendation 5

- To promote the remunerations and allowances that are available to Members on the Council's website and to candidates standing for Election by linking with the Council's Democracy page

Outcome: Promoting the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Recommendation 6

- To promote the Councils democracy pages and the role of a Councillor to established groups, such as School Governors who are often already active within their local communities and could potentially look to become candidates at a future election.

Outcome: Promoting the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Recommendation 7

- To liaise with the Council's **Employment, Education & Training** team to establish the opportunity for a 'Democracy stall' at a future Council Career Fair to further promote the role of a Councillor and how democracy works within RCT and Wales.

Outcome: Promoting the role of a Councillor and the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Recommendation 8

- Members welcome the introduction of a Public Participation Strategy and welcome the opportunity to drive forward further public engagement in democracy by seeking the public's view on items for consideration at scrutiny meetings, ensuring work programmes are dealing with issues that matter to residents of the County Borough. As part of the duty of the Act and to engage the public in local democracy the Council will need to provide a constitution guide to be developed and promoted on the Council website which the working group also welcomes.

Outcome: Improved public engagement to better inform the democratic process

Recommendation 9

- To continue to address the works needed at the Council Chamber to ensure that the Chamber is Fully accessible.

Outcome: Fully accessible to reduce any barriers for any disabled Member

Recommendation 10

- Following the easing of lock down restrictions and when safe to do so take forward the opportunity for the promotion of 'open invites' to the Chamber for potential candidates so they can learn more about the role of a Councillor and work within a Council Chamber.

Outcome – Engagement opportunities and Promotion of the role of a Councillor and the work of the Council

Recommendation 11

- That the Member induction programme provides all Members with the skills and knowledge base to undertake their role. Ensure that a rolling programme of training is developed for each Member throughout their term of office and to provide the opportunity for mentoring for Newly Elected Members when requested.

Outcome – Members feel confident in performing their duties and have a wide knowledge base

Recommendation 12

- To undertake a diversity survey with Members which will provide a benchmark for future elections and allow the Council Business unit to review the support / barriers that may have been experienced by a Member during their term of office. The undertaking of such a review will help to deliver a positive and diverse environment for future Members to undertake their roles.

Outcomes -Provide a benchmark of the diversity of Members within RCT

Recommendation 13

- To ensure Members are advised of the support available to them through the Council Business unit and the Head of Democratic Services – providing contact details at the earliest opportunity during the Member Induction. Ensuring Members are aware of the ‘Open Door’ policy of the Head of Democratic Services.

Outcome – Members feel supported during their role

Outcome Measure – Members Annual Survey

Recommendation 14

- To consider introducing a ‘statement of understanding’ for Members outlining their duties as a Councillor including the need to have mutual respect within the Council Chamber.

Outcome – A demonstration of mutual respect to other people with varying political opinions, show of working together for the benefit of its communities.

Recommendation 15

- That the Members Portal is utilised to provide Members with bitesize’ information in respect of ‘diversity within RCT’ to assist Members in their understanding and promotion of diversity within their wards and across the County Borough.

Outcome – Supporting Members to deliver for the needs of the communities

Recommendation 16

- To seek the participation of Group Leaders to champion the diversity expectations within the selection processes of their political parties and to encourage Group Leaders to promote the advice available to future candidates or individuals considering standing for office at the earliest opportunity.

Outcome – Opportunities for a more diverse range of candidates selected

3. INTERIM REPORT

- 3.1 At the Democratic Services Committee meeting on the 1st October 2020, Members considered the written statement from the Minister for Housing and Local Government on [phase 2 of the diversity in democracy programme](#). Following consideration of the statement and the action plan outlined within, Members resolved to take forward a working group to consider aspects of the plan in respect of diversity.
- 3.2 The Working Group consisted of:
County Borough Councillor M Adams (Chair); County Borough Councillor H Fychan (Vice Chair), County Borough Councillor M Webber (Equalities Champion), County Borough Councillor J Bonetto, County Borough Councillor J Edwards, County Borough Councillor E Stephens, County Borough Councillor S Powderhill, County Borough Councillor L Walker.
Community Councillor J. Turner Llanharan Community Council.
- 3.3 At its inaugural meeting on the 26th January 2021 the group confirmed its terms of reference and scope of its work.
- 3.4 The working Group have already identified a number of recommendations through its work done to date, although it is clear that their work will continue up to the Local Government Elections 2022 to ensure that a more diverse democratic environment is created within Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 3.5 Producing this interim report for consideration by the Democratic Services Committee allows the recommendations already identified by the Working Group to be actioned.
- 3.6 A number of the recommendations identified by the working group involve awareness raising opportunities to future candidates, therefore the sooner such work commences the sooner such engagement with a wider range of diverse candidates can begin.
- 3.7 At its meeting on the 28th April, the working group agreed its interim report for consideration at the next meeting of the Democratic Services Committee.

4 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The work of the Diversity working group looks to improve the equality and diversity across the County Borough and the within the local democracy setting. The more representative of society and diverse our Councillors 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

5 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Not applicable.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 6.1 There are no financial implications aligned to the recommendations. The awareness raising opportunities can be delivered through platforms already available to the Council.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 outlines a number of duties placed on Local Authorities in respect of the diversity agenda.

8. LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

- 8.1 The work of a Councillor is fundamental to the Council's Corporate plan, as Councillors are the mouthpiece for the communities that they serve.
- 8.2 Ensuring that there are greater opportunities for a more diverse democracy across RCT links to the Wellbeing of Future Generations goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

9 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Trying to achieve a diverse culture is challenging and the working group have, in a short period of time, already identified potential barriers that may dissuade members of the public to stand as a candidate for election.
- 9.2 As a Council we need to ensure that any perceived barriers are eradicated and instead celebrate and promote the rewarding experiences of becoming a Councillor.
- 9.2 If endorsed, the recommendations of the working group will look to be implemented as soon as possible, due to the need to try to engage as many potential candidates in the Local Government 2022 elections.