



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

26th MAY 2021

DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATION.

1. PURPOSE FOR THE REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Members of the WLGA Council 'Diversity in Democracy' report and the work of the Council's own Democratic Services Committee in respect of diversity, and the resulting actions that need to be taken forward by the Council in addressing each of their content.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To note the work of the Democratic Services Committee and the interim report of the Working Group produced to promote the diversity agenda within the Council, as attached as appendix A.
2. To note the actions outlined within the WLGA Council report, as attached at appendix B.
3. To endorse in principle a 'Diverse Council' declaration and agree for a bespoke RCTCBC diversity declaration to be brought forward to the July Council meeting.
4. To receive updates and progress reports on the work needed to be undertaken by the Council in respect of the actions outlined within the WLGA Council report and the ongoing work of the Democratic Services Committee as and when appropriate.

3. DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY

- 3.1 The diversity agenda has been growing across all aspects of public life and it is important that Rhondda Cynon Taf Council are committed to increasing diversity, which includes tackling the barriers which prevent an individual's active participation in local democracy.
- 3.2 A more diverse democracy means decision-makers with broader life-experiences and a greater understanding of the challenges faced by wider society. A diverse and more inclusive democracy leads to better engagement with individuals and communities, in turn leading to greater levels of confidence and trust and in turn better decision making and better governance.

- 3.3 The Welsh Government have been focusing heavily on the diversity agenda and following the evaluation of phase one of the Welsh Government's Diversity in Democracy work a number of key recommendations and actions were derived, with such actions being addressed through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Further work by the WLGA Council has also strengthened the impetus for diversity actions to be considered and implemented now, to allow any improvement in diversity within democracy for the Local Government Elections in 2022 and beyond.
- 3.4 In light of the work undertaken by the Welsh Government and the importance seen by not only the Democratic Services Committee but the Council as a whole of achieving diversity in democracy, the Democratic Services Committee established a working group to look in detail at the proposed actions that have come forward from the above mentioned evaluation. The Working Group are also considering the opportunities and engagement which would benefit the future of diversity in advance of the 2022 local government elections to encourage participation as a principal authority and with both Community and Town Councils across the County Borough.

4 DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY – DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE INTERIM REPORT.

- 4.1 The Democratic Services Committee Working Group have been focused with their work and are clear that their work will be an ongoing process to ensure that a more diverse democratic environment is created within Rhondda Cynon Taf. Their work included aspects of awareness raising for the recent Senedd Elections and the longer-term work that is needed for the Local Government Elections in 2022. It is important to emphasise that the Working Group were aware that some aspects of the diversity agenda were outside its remit and that of the Council and such areas needed to be taken forward by political parties and other stakeholder groups. The Working Group do however plan to meet with Group Leaders as part of their work to promote the actions needed to be taken forward, due to the important role that they play. The Working Group will look to seek the participation of Group Leaders to champion the diversity expectations within the selection processes of their political parties and also assist by promoting the advice available to future candidate or individuals considering standing for office at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.2 Through its initial findings the Working Group developed a range of interim recommendations which would assist in promoting the diversity agenda. These recommendations were endorsed at the recent meeting of the Democratic Services Committee on the 10th May 2021. There is still further work for the Working Group to address, but it is felt timely that the work done to date is reported on and the recommendations actioned upon.

- 4.3 The interim report of the Democratic Services Committee Working Group is attached as Appendix A, which includes 16 recommendations to support the diversity agenda.

5 WLGA COUNCIL

- 5.1 Like many Councils, the WLGA has committed to making a step change in local government diversity at the 2022 local elections. At a special meeting during April, the WLGA Council endorsed its 'Diversity in Democracy report' (attached at appendix B). 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.
- 5.2 It is advised that the WLGA will take forward several actions nationally, as outlined within the report such as:
- The launch of the [beacouncillor.wales](https://www.beacouncillor.wales) website already in place.
 - Representations will be made to political parties to take action and make progress
 - Representation to Welsh Government and the Independent Remuneration Panel that councillors should be entitled to 'resettlement grants' (effectively redundancy payments) should they lose their seat at an election.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 Members' allowances play a critical role in encouraging greater diversity; some councillors can be disproportionately affected if they are on low incomes or have caring responsibilities. Many councillors are dissuaded from claiming their full entitlements to allowances, such as reimbursements of costs of care or travel, due to peer or public pressure. The WLGA Council therefore unanimously agreed that there is a need to foster a culture where all councillors are encouraged and supported to claim any necessary allowances or expenses to which they are entitled.
- 5.5 The WLGA Council also 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. The report includes 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.
- 5.6 Councils may however wish to undertake further action or commitments within their Declarations according to local priorities.
- 5.7 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.
- 5.8 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.

6 ACTIONS GOING FORWARD.

- 6.1 It is suggested that the Actions outlined within the WLGA Council report are added to the Action plan already developed by the Democratic Services Committee working group in respect of work already identified by the Council in respect of diversity.
- 6.2 Timely progress reports and updates will be provided to the Working Group to ensure the group are happy with the delivery of the actions.
- 6.3 Work will need to be taken forward with Group Leaders of the Council to strengthen the diversity outcomes that are anticipated and to ensure all ways possible of achieving a greater diverse RCT is achieved.
- 6.4 Work on a Diversity Declaration, bespoke to the Council will be taken forward and presented to the July Council meeting, to meet the required timescales set by the WLGA

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The work of the Democratic Services Committee Diversity working group 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 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.

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 Democratic Services Committee – [10th May 2021](#).

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

9.1 The awareness raising opportunities referenced within the interim report can be delivered through platforms already available to the Council. In respect of 'resettlement grants' proposed by the WLGA financial implications may be incurred.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

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

11.1 The work of a Councillor is fundamental to the Council's Corporate plan, as Councillors are the mouthpiece for the communities that they serve.

11.2 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.

12 CONCLUSION

12.1 Trying to achieve a diverse culture is challenging and the Democratic Services Committee 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.

12.2 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.

12.2 The recommendations of the working group and the actions identified by the WLGA 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.

12.3 The Diversity Declaration will need to be presented to Council by July 2021.