



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEE

12 NOVEMBER 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 work of the Council in respect of diversity in democracy, including details of the WLGA Council 'Diversity in Democracy' report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To note the work of RCT Council to promote the diversity agenda and to consider any aspects that could be taken forward by the Council's Town and Community Councils.

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 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 the Council as a whole of achieving diversity in democracy, the Council's 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 Council's 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 candidates 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 meeting of the Democratic Services Committee on the 10th May 2021 and further supported by full Council on the 26th May 2021.
- 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.
- 4.4 As part of the recommendations the working group recommended the following in relation to Town and Community Councils:-

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.

4.5 The Council are currently completing the amendments to the Council democracy pages and once completed, these pages will be shared with Town and Community Councils. It is suggested that aspects of these pages could be linked with each Community and Town Council's webpage for further promotion.

4.6 Work will soon commence with the undertaking of a 'Role of a Councillor' video with Town and Community Councillors to further promote the role which will be included on the Council's democracy webpages to further promote diversity and promotion of the role to any potential candidates.

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.

4.7 Communication has been taken forward with the Manager of the Employment, Education & Training team and meetings will take place over the next month to discuss how best to engage in the Career Fairs. It will be important that the role of a community and town councillor is also promoted at such fairs.

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.

4.8 Although restrictions are easing the Council still want to continue a cautious approach to attendance in the Council Chamber, currently only inviting Elected Members and Officers to attend. However when such opportunities do arise the role of a Community and Town Councillor will also be promoted at such open invites.

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 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 TAKEN FORWARD BY RCT COUNCIL.

- 6.1 At a special meeting of the Council on the 26th May 2021, the Council agreed that the Actions outlined within the WLGA Council report were to be 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 In addition the Council pledged to become a diverse Council and to take forward a diversity declaration bespoke to the Council

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 RCT 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 All Councils need to ensure that any perceived barriers are eradicated and instead celebrate and promote the rewarding experiences of becoming a Councillor.