DIVERSITY
IN DEMOCRACY

The Interim Update Report of the Diversity in Democracy Working Group.

2021.

Chairs Foreword – County Borough Councillor M Adams

Diversity within Local Government is all about creating an inclusive environment, accepting of every individual's differences, enabling all Councillors to achieve their full potential and as a result, allowing Council services to reach their fullest potential for the benefit of its residents. If you value each person's differences, regardless of age, disability, ethnic background, gender identify, religion or belief, political persuasion, or sexual orientation then you are allowing each person to contribute their unique experiences, which can have an extremely positive impact on the work of a Council as a whole and the people that we serve. 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.

However, trying to achieve this diverse culture is challenging and as a working group we 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. We need to ensure that any perceived barriers are eradicated and instead celebrate and promote the rewarding experiences of becoming a Councillor. We need to demonstrate the flexibilities of the Council to allow for a work life balance, which will further be enhanced through the potential for conducting hybrid meetings. We need to promote the renumeration available to Elected Members and the training opportunities and support provided, such as a carers allowance, so that any future candidate is aware of the support open to them. We need to engage with our communities and groups to educate and promote the democratic process to make it engaging to residents, who may feel inspired to attend and one day become that Councillor.

 We recognise that Town and Community Councils provide a vital connection for communities into decision making and we need to work with our Community and Town Council colleagues to engage with potential candidates and support their elected members. It was therefore important as a working group looking at this issue that we had a Community Council representative as a member of the working group.

The work of the group is fast moving and already actions have been outlined as a response to the provisions in the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 that will take forward the diversity agenda and the recent recommendations of the WLGA Council report. Our work will be ongoing until the 2022 Local Government Elections as we work to ensure that the Council achieves all it can to push the diversity agenda and develop a more diverse democratic profile. However, there are many things outside of our control and work will

need to be taken forward in conjunction with political parties and other stakeholders to push the agenda forward.

This interim report allows us to compile the work achieved to date and the recommendations we feel are necessary to positively start the engagement and educating of the democratic process within Rhondda Cynon Taf. We need to act now to reach out to potential candidates. We also need to continue our momentum of engaging with the youth voters through the voting awareness raising campaigns that have been taken forward for the Senedd elections as our young people are the mouthpiece and potential Councillors of the future.

Can I thank all the Members of the working group for their valuable contributions, especially my Vice Chair, Councillor Heledd Fychan. I would also like to thank officers for their attendance, especially the Council's Diversity and Inclusion Manager, representatives from the Youth Engagement & Participation Service and the Head of Democratic Services and his team.

Cllr. M.Adams.

Diversity in Democracy.

It is important for democratic institutions and public services to reflect the diversity of the population they represent and serve. 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. It is important that the people who make decisions on behalf of the people are in tune with and representative of their local communities, unfortunately this is not always the case.

The diversity agenda has been growing across all aspects of public life and it is important that we as a Council are committed to increasing diversity, which includes tackling the barriers which prevent an individual's active participation in local democracy.

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 have been 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.

In light of this 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 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.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference agreed by the working group at its inaugural meeting are detailed below

 "The Working Group will:

- Review the actions outlined within the Welsh Government Phase 2 Action Plan in relation to Diversity in Democracy in order to consider proposals to support these objectives;
- Consider what the Council can do to raise awareness and promotion of the role of Councillors, to reduce potential barriers to becoming a Councillor (County Borough / Community / Town) with the aim of encouraging future candidates from diverse backgrounds to come forward for Election.

Proposed Outcome from undertaking the review:

- To increase diversity within democracy at the local Government Elections 2022 and any future election.
- To reduce the barriers to attracting a more diverse pool of candidates
- To promote and raise awareness of the role of a Councillor and the work undertaken
- To consider Officer proposals to engage and support potential candidates
- To consider and comment upon engagement with 16 – 17 year old's in local government democracy.
- To consider proposals for the future training / information provided to Councillors in respect of diversity
- To inform discussions with Group Leaders ahead of the 2022 Local Government Elections

Membership of the Group

The membership of the 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 S Stephens, County Borough Councillor S Powderhill, County Borough Councillor L Walker.

Community Councillor J. Turner Llanharan Community Council.

Is there Diversity in Democracy? – Current Position.

People assume 'diversity' relates to the sex of a person or their ethnicity and this is generally how diversity is gauged, however *Diversity is more than gender or ethnic diversity; it is about different voices, not just different characteristics of people.*

There is no County Borough Council in Wales in which both sexes are equally represented. More often, women make up between 20 and 30% and sometimes less. The average age of councillors in Wales is around 60 and has remained stubbornly within that range for many years. The number of non-white councillors is miniscule even in areas of Wales with relatively large numbers of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic citizens.

The 2017 local elections saw small improvements in gender balance across Wales: 29% of all candidates were women (up by 1% from 2012); 28% of councillors elected were women (up 2% from 2012) and 32% of all newly elected members were women. The gender balance of cabinet members also remains low and lower than the proportion of women councillors at 27.5%. The age profile of councillors did not change significantly remaining 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 1.8% of councillors were black or ethnic minorities compared to 4.7% for the Welsh population. 16% of candidates and 11% of councillors stated that they had a disability, and there remain a range of challenges for disabled people participating in the democratic process. The report on the Local Government Candidates Survey 2017 provides further information about both candidates and elected councillors.

Diversity within Democracy RCT?

There is currently no quantified profile on the diversity of Members within the Council membership, which is something the working group are looking to address. However, when looking at the gender balance within the democratic structure there is the following:

- Of the Council's current 73 Elected Members (2 vacant seats as at April 2021) **39** are **Male** and **34** are **Female**
- RCT Cabinet: 5 Men / 4 Women
- Chairs/Vice Chairs: 18 Women have been appointed as either a Chair/Vice-Chair
                15 Men have been appointed as either a Chair/Vice-Chair

When looking at the age profile of Members it is recognised that the majority of Member are above 60.

Age Group	No. Of Members
18 – 30:	4
31-40:	8
41 – 50:	12
51-60:	19
60+:	30

In light of the above information RCT Council favours well in comparison to many other Local Authorities with its gender balance ratio. However, there is still lots the Council must do to attract other diverse candidates in coming forward and engaging within the democratic process.

What are the barriers to democracy?

The role of a councillor is stimulating, rewarding and regarded as a privilege by many. The role however is a challenging and demanding one and is not one that should be considered lightly; it is a complex and demanding role, which requires a significant time commitment and can therefore have implications on people's family lives and work-life balance. It can impact on a professional career and on an individual's income and future financial security. It is also a role that can expose individuals (and their families) to regular personal criticism, insults and even threats, particularly through social media.

A number of studies have been compiled to look at the barriers to democracy with such studies highlighting:

- Child care and other caring responsibilities
- Time-commitment and meeting times
- Public criticism and online abuse
- Public's understanding of local government and the role and responsibilities of councillors and the Council itself is limited therefore portraying a political and organisational culture
- Remuneration and Employment
- Role models and incumbency

Members of the Group agreed with the above barriers and also considered the following as potential barriers within RCT:

- Disability access
- Technical / Digital Barriers
- Language Barriers
- Support and guidance for independent candidates

Members of the group spoke of their personal barriers to becoming a Councillor and it was considered important that such examples are highlighted to potential candidates to illustrate how those barriers can be broken down and the rewards that are brought by pursuing the role of a Councillor.

How can we improve? – *The Work and Findings of the Working Group.*

The 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 has included aspects of awareness raising for the forthcoming 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.

The Working Group were also conscious of the need to include Community and Town Councils within its work as it appreciates the role fellow colleagues play within the communities that they serve.

Awareness Raising – the Right to Vote.

Members felt it was crucial that as part of their work they look to promote the right to vote to the newly enfranchised 16 -17 year olds, who for the first time will be able to vote in the Senedd Elections and will be able to vote in the 2022 Local Government Elections Wales. Members also addressed the need to focus not only on the youth vote but also widen the campaign to engage with any disenfranchised voters. Awareness raising campaigns have also been undertaken by the Welsh Government and Electoral Commission and such materials have been promoted to youth groups within RCT via the YEPS service, as well as the service taking forward its own awareness raising campaign.

Welsh Government HWB resources – Vote 16 ; PleidLais /Voice2Vote ; Raise yourvoice
The Welsh Government provided numerous resource materials to promote and help educate new young voters. The Voice2Vote resources pack developed by the Welsh Government included online resources aimed at young people aged 13 and over in Wales which brought to life why young people should vote. The vote16 resources provided online videos and access to events and activities that could be undertaken to again educate young people on the importance of voting and also how to vote. Dissemination of these materials were provided to YEPs and work by the Council was being undertaken in respect of dissemination to Schools. Due to the Covid Pandemic and the lockdown restrictions and closure of schools the dissemination within schools was not as productive as previously anticipated. However, going forward, with the easing of restrictions it is anticipated that future work with schools can be taken forward ahead of the Local Government Elections. The Working Group were keen for opportunities to still be made available for such engagement and awareness raising through the welsh baccalaureate and citizenship lessons.

Electoral Commission - [Welcome to your Vote](#)

The Electoral Commission have created a new set of educational resources for newly enfranchised 16 and 17 year olds in Wales, who are preparing to cast their votes for the first time. The tools, designed for use in classrooms and with youth groups across Wales, were intended to help young people who are voting for the first time at the Senedd elections. The handbooks, videos and quizzes cover three key topics – what you can vote for, campaigning and how to vote, - and aim to demystify the voting process for young voters.

YEPs – #Isityourfirsttime Voting Campaign.
The working group were pleased to welcome representatives from the YEPs service who advised of the positive engagement undertaken to date in respect of the awareness raising within young people in the County Borough on their rights to vote and the importance and impact of their vote. Their campaign 'isityourfirsttime' which was led by the young people has been pushed through a number of platforms via the service (facebook, twitter, snapchat, Instagram, ticktock), including use of the YEPs tv live (an online programme dedicated to the voting campaign). Members were advised that the youth Members were the mouthpiece to promoting the campaign to their peers and positive engagement had been received. In addition youth workers based within schools and colleges were also assisting with promoting the campaign message.

Youth Decide – RCT Council Campaign.
The Council's Communications Team in discussion with the working group developed a number of social media infographics highlighting the importance of the youth vote which was disseminated through the Council's social media platforms. A social media video entitled 'Don't leave yourself on mute' was also taken forward. It is suggested that the work done to date on these campaign materials be reviewed following the Senedd Election to ensure they are fit for purpose for the 2022 Local Elections. It is anticipated that a collaborated approach could be taken forward with Schools and YEPs to assist in the development of the campaign materials to ensure young people can relate to the messages within.
(Details and examples of the social media posts can be found in appendix 1 of the report.)

Diversity Action Plan – Council Driven Actions.

In September 2020, the Minister for Housing and Local Government provided an update on the 'Phase Two - Diversity in Democracy Programme Action Plan' developed by the Welsh Government. A number of the actions outlined by Welsh Government have been included within the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act and will therefore naturally be taken forward by the Council as part of the Acts legislative requirements i.e Public Participation Strategy / webcasting requirements / hybrid meetings. The Working Group however utilised this key document and identified what actions would be driven by Welsh Government and those that could be taken forward by the Council to improve democracy within the Council. The actions outlined by Members resulted in a detailed 'Council Driven Action Plan' which resulted in a number of recommendations that could be taken forward in the first instance. Such areas highlighted by Members included work on the Council website to include videos and details of the 'life of a councillor', work to be taken forward in the Council Chamber to ensure accessibility and promotion of translation facilities. Another suggestion by Members

was the promotion of the Role of a Councillor through the RCT jobs fair. Members were keen to promote such advantages and opportunities to promote the work of a Councillor and to prevent any potential barriers that may be perceived by a prospective candidate.

The Action Plan of the Working Group is attached as Appendix 2 of the report.

Diversity & Inclusion Events – The working Group have utilised the knowledge and experience of the Council's Equalities and Inclusion Manager who has provided details of the diversity and inclusion work of the Council's Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) team to support the Council in fulfilling its responsibilities under equalities law. This provided much valuable information to the group and it was noted that Elected Members should be proactively involved in the programmes and events supported and promoted by the Council.

Social Media and Standards & Ethics - Disrespectful Behaviour– Members of the group spoke passionately about their role as a Councillor highlighting both the positives and negatives that can come with the role. Often Members are subject to disrespectful behaviour, especially through Social Media. It was highlighted that further training would be taken forward with Members in respect of social media, providing Members with what 'was and wasn't' acceptable behaviour for Members to contend with. It was also noted that on occasions, in the heat of debate the Council Chamber could potentially see moments of disrespectful behaviour towards Members of different political persuasions. Members felt strongly that such behaviour was unnecessary and could often be seen as a barrier to promoting the role of a Councillor. It was discussed that the open-door policy of the Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer needed to be further promoted so that Members felt assured that they could report any such behaviour. A mutual respect policy or a statement of understanding could be developed for all Members to sign up too outlining their duties as a Councillor including the need to have mutual respect within the Council Chamber was suggested as a way forward.

Members Support – Ensuring Member's mental health is more important now than ever as Members balance the demands of work life balance and their role as a Councillor during the Covid Pandemic and as the Council and residents of RCT recover from it . New demands have been placed on Members as they learn new ways of working to ensure they can fulfil all of their roles as a Councillor and are still able to meet the needs of their constituents. Further promotion of the 'Time to Talk' campaign to Members and the opportunities and support that Members can access through the Council's Occupational Health Service needs to be taken forward for Elected Members. Working Group Members also discussed how the promotion of such services should be promoted to future candidates, and as picked up during their work in the Action Plan, the opportunities for reasonable adjustments should also be highlighted.

Members Training – Members of the Working Group are aware of the amendments being made to the Induction Curriculum Framework for Candidates and New Members in Wales for the Local Elections 2022 which is being developed by Local Authorities working with the WLGA**.** This framework outlines the curriculum for the induction of members in Wales leading up to and following the local elections in 2022. It sets out the suggested local and national

activities to support potential and new members. It is not designed to be prescriptive as the needs of each Council and Councillor are different. It should however provide a guide for what should be considered when developing local programmes. The Framework is being designed to fit with the *Development Framework for Members*, a competency framework for members which provides more information about the subjects which should be covered in both induction and ongoing member development. It also fits with the *Wales Charter for Member Support and Development* and takes account of the legislative requirements for members including those set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

Following the delivery of an induction programme, further development for councillors should be informed by an annual personal development reviews (PDRs). Members of the Working Group were keen for aspects of diversity to be included in the framework and the Induction programme for RCT that would further be developed for all Members following the 2022 Local Elections. Members are keen for 'Unconscious Bias' to be taken forward as a training module as well as training on the menopause and social media. In addition the group discussed Members receiving timely 'bitesize' information in respect of 'diversity within RCT' which could be presented through the Members portal to assist Members in their understanding and promotion of diversity within their wards and across the County Borough.

Future Open days – Members felt it would be beneficial to take forward open day events at the Council Chamber (when covid restrictions allows) to allow potential candidates to have a feel for the Council Chamber and to learn more about the role of a Councillor and work within a Council Chamber. With the new ways of working Members will be able to attend Council meetings remotely or through a hybrid setting, which allows Members further flexibility and balance of other commitments. The provision of webcasting and the live streaming of meetings will also help to promote public participation in the democratic process and hopefully engage with future candidates. Such webcasting recordings provide a powerful demonstration of democracy and part of the role of a councillor and raise awareness of the work of the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through its initial findings the Working Group have developed a range of interim recommendations which will assist in promoting the diversity agenda, which they put forward to the Democratic Services for consideration. 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 suggested recommendations are considered to allow for them to be actioned if agreed. To assist in the Committees deliberations the recommendations also seek to illustrate the potential outcome such a recommendation would have so that its impact could be easily demonstrated and measured if successful.

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 Key Stage 3, the welsh baccalaureate 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.

Outcome Measure: Survey of young people following such engagement / Registration drive/campaign to increase numbers of 16 and 17 year olds on the register.

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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.

Outcome Measure: Number of first-time youth voters on the Electoral Register

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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

Outcome Measure: Website page viewing figures

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

Outcome Measure: Website page viewing figures

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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

Outcome Measure: Website page viewing figures

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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

Outcome Measure: Website page viewing figures, survey of candidates.

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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

Outcome Measure: Number of people who engage at the event

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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

Outcome Measure: webcasting viewing figures / more public engagement within the democratic process

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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

Outcome Measure – Disabled Participants (members of the public) / Elected Members are able to engage at meetings in the Chamber

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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

Outcome Measure - Attendance at the event

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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

Outcome Measure – Members annual survey / Members PDR process

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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

Outcome Measure – Survey responses

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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

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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.

Outcome Measure – Number of formal or informal complaints received in respect of Members behaviour

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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

Outcome Measure – Members annual survey

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Recommendation 16

- To seeking 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

Outcome Measure - Survey of candidates standing for election.

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