

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

COUNCIL: 6TH DECEMBER, 2021

REFERENCE FROM DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE: 22ND NOVEMBER, 2021

“ DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY – ACTION PLAN (HDS) –

The Head of Democratic Services advised that Council, at its meeting on 26th July 2021 had considered an initial report on Diversity in Democracy resolving as follows (Minute No. 298):

“(1) T H A T the making of the following Vale of Glamorgan “Diverse Council” Declaration be approved: “The Vale of Glamorgan Council will:

- (i) Provide a clear, public commitment to improving diversity;
- (ii) Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all;
- (iii) Consider staggering Council meeting times and agreeing recess periods to support Councillors with other commitments; and
- (iv) Set out an action plan of activity ahead of the 2022 Local Government Elections.”

A Draft Diversity in Democracy Action Plan had therefore been prepared which was attached at Appendix A to the report for the Committees consideration. The plan included details of planned activities to be undertaken by the Council ahead of the Local Government Elections in 2022 as well as some activities that were proposed to be undertaken following the elections. The objectives within the Action Plan had been based on those suggested by Welsh Government.

RESOLVED – T H A T the Diversity in Democracy Action Plan be endorsed, and the report and Action Plan be referred to the next meetings of Cabinet and Council recommending adoption of the Action Plan.

Reason for decision

To formally adopt the proposed Action Plan and to support the work associated with Welsh Government’s Diversity in Democracy Agenda.”

Attached as Appendix – Report to Democratic Services Committee: 22nd November, 2021

Meeting of:	Democratic Services Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 22 November 2021
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	All Scrutiny Committees
Report Title:	Diversity in Democracy – Action Plan
Purpose of Report:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To set out an Action Plan setting out how the Council can support the Diversity in Democracy Programme. • To recommend the Diversity in Democracy Action Plan to Council for adoption.
Report Owner:	J. Rees, Head of Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	Jeff Rees, Head of Democratic Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	<p>Managing Director</p> <p>Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services</p> <p>Head of Policy and Business Transformation</p> <p>Electoral Registration Public Awareness Officer</p>
Policy Framework:	<p>Strategic Equality Plan 2020 – 2024</p> <p>Equality Act 2010</p> <p>Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021</p>
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To seek the Committee’s endorsement of the draft Action Plan attached at Appendix A and to recommend it to Council for adoption.

Recommendation

1. T H A T the Diversity in Democracy Action Plan be supported and the Committee refers the report and Action Plan to the next meeting of Cabinet and Council recommending its adoption.

Reason for Recommendation

1. To formally adopt the proposed Action Plan and to support the work associated with Welsh Government's Diversity in Democracy Agenda.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) supported a Welsh Government led Diversity in Democracy Programme ahead of the 2017 elections. However, although the Diversity in Democracy Programme was the biggest and most resourced programme of its kind, data shows that there remains a significant lack of diversity in Welsh Councils.
- 1.2 The WLGA Council agreed in September 2018 to take steps to advance gender equality and diversity in Councils before the 2022 elections. This was in recognition of the lack of diversity in Welsh Councils. A cross party Working Group was set up to explore broader under-representation in democracy. Part of the remit of the Working Group was to consider what activities Councils and the WLGA could do to improve diversity in democracy and the role of the Welsh Government and political parties.
- 1.3 In addition to the Working Group the Minister for Housing and Local Government convened a stakeholder roundtable of regional stakeholder events. Key messages were:
 - There was a general lack of awareness of the role and contribution made by Councillors;
 - Social media abuse directed at Councillors is getting worse and is predominately directed at female / family members;
 - Training and development for Councillors was fundamental;
 - Time commitment was a barrier for many;
 - A recurring theme was the provision of costs to those standing for election particularly disabled candidates or those with a protected characteristic;
 - There was confusion about whether and what Councillors are paid and on what basis and whether remuneration paid covers the costs associated with the role.
- 1.4 The findings of the Working Group and the stakeholder engagements was reported to the WLGA Committee on 5th March, 2021 where it was widely acknowledged that representational equality results in better decision making and policy development when people with lived experience of issues are making the decisions.

- 1.5** It also identified that the “right person for the job” of Councillor needs to be a member of the community they serve in order to fully and consistently understand the lives and needs of that community. Councils also need to demonstrate to under-represented communities that they are valued and included in local democracy.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** Council, at its meeting on 26th July, 2021 considered its initial report on Diversity in Democracy and resolved (Minute No. 298):

(1) T H A T the making of the following Vale of Glamorgan “Diverse Council” Declaration be approved:

“The Vale of Glamorgan Council will:

- (i) Provide a clear, public commitment to improving diversity;
 - (ii) Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all;
 - (iii) Consider staggering Council meeting times and agreeing recess periods to support Councillors with other commitments; and
 - (iv) Set out an action plan of activity ahead of the 2022 Local Government Elections.
- (2)

Diversity in Democracy Action Plan

- 2.2** The initial intention was to submit a draft Action Plan to a sub-committee of this Committee, however due to a number of competing priorities this has not been possible. Therefore, the draft Action Plan has been brought to the Committee for endorsement.
- 2.3** A Draft Diversity in Democracy Action Plan is set out in Appendix A and details planned activities to be undertaken by the Council ahead of next year’s Local Government Elections. The objectives within the Action Plan are based on those suggested by the Welsh Government.

Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

- 2.4** The above legislation includes a number of provisions promoting diversity in local government including:
- An entitlement to Job Sharing for Executive Members and Committee Chairs;
 - A duty on Principal Councils to produce a Public Participation Strategy encouraging people to participate in decision making and promoting awareness of how to become a Member of the Council;
 - A duty on political Group Leaders to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members of their Group;
 - Electronic broadcasting of Full Council meetings;

- The ability to have multi-location attendance at Council meetings including physical, hybrid and remote attendance;
- Provisions enabling the maximum period of absence for each type of family absence for Members of Local Authorities to be specified within regulations and for adoptive leave to reflect that which is available to employees.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

3.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the Socio-Economic Duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage;
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language;
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English;
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

3.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development; Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the “well-being goals”.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

4.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report at this stage. The WLGA Diversity in Democracy Programme does include considerations around resettlement grants for senior salary holders which will have financial implications, however this will require legislation to be put in place.

Employment

4.2 There are no employment implications associated with this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

4.3 There are no legal implications associated with this report at this stage.

4.4 This report sets out a Diversity in Democracy Action Plan. The Committee / Council is being asked to support this work which will have a positive impact on the community as a whole in ensuring that Councillors represent the diverse electorate and work towards the wider agenda of achieving diversity in democracy.

5. Background Papers

None.

Action Plan - Council Focused

The plan has been drafted to illustrate the Welsh Government overall objectives and Council derived actions to progress.

Objective 1: Increase understanding of different tiers of government in Wales, the role each plays in society and how they operate.	
Potential Actions for the Council	Proposed Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissemination of Welsh Government educational resources to accompany the extension of the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds in Wales Guidance and workshop setting with 16- and 17-year-olds regarding Democracy in Wales 	<p>Resources have been developed by WG and have been disseminated through YEPs. Work is now being undertaken with dissemination to Schools.</p> <p>Build on previous work undertaken for the Senedd elections to maintain and build on the Vale website resources page information to schools and subject to Covid restrictions deliver face to face presentation or virtual assembly meetings in the school environment. Pages already hold useful resources. (co-production between the Youth Participation Team and the Vale Youth Council of a short video to show how easy it is to complete an online application form already available).</p> <p>Similar to exercise for the Senedd elections 2021 to use social media campaign to engage with youth voters, raising awareness of the importance of voting and how democracy can affect their lives.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Campaigns – to include use of Social Media to engage with youth voters 	<p>Comms campaign to focus on wider stakeholder groups to achieve a wider audience including seldom heard from communities. Involvement of Youth Participation Team, Bro Radio.</p> <p>Education to assist by providing information of all young people over the age of 14 each year send out Invitation to Register forms and use of a prize draw to encourage registration.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the 'Council Business' page on the Council website providing information on how the Council 	<p>The Council website holds details of Council Business, Councillor details and election results however, there is opportunity to review this area</p>

works and the different tiers of government.	and provide details and links of the different tiers of government to assist in increasing the understanding of democracy.
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<p>Objective 2: Increase engagement with the public to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raise awareness of the role and activities of the Council provide clarity about how the public can better inform local decision making; • build greater community cohesion through a greater presence at community events, creating and building upon community networks. 	
Potential Actions	Proposed Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting the role of a Councillor and the work of the Council 	<p>Opportunity to link to the Council web page of ‘becoming a Councillor’ the educational resources that are available with update WLGA information.</p> <p>There is a need to promote how the work of a Councillor links in with everyday services taken forward by the Council and again there is the opportunity for this to be demonstrated through the ‘Council’ webpages, with this in turn being illustrated during the youth engagement sessions to strengthen the connection of how people’s votes can impact on the work of the Council. Following the Covid regulations, meetings of the Council are undertaken virtually and recordings of which are published on the Council website. Such recordings provide a powerful demonstration of democracy and part of the role of a Councillor and raise awareness of the work of the Council. (Week in the life of a Councillor.)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce a Public Participation Strategy 	<p>Opportunity to work with Town and Community Councils to ensure links with ‘Becoming a Councillor page’ are promoted on own website / social media platforms.</p> <p>There is an opportunity to take forward promotion of the role of a Councillor and democracy at future Career Fairs taken forward by the Council.</p> <p>We will review the webpage to make sure it is written in language and uses terms that the public will understand.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of Council’s Constitution and Constitution Guide to increase public engagement 	<p>The Council Constitution provides guidance on how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are to be followed to ensure these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. 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’s website.</p> <p>We will promote this information on social media using links with a wide range of organisations to ensure the message reaches all communities, including under-represented groups.</p>
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Objective 3: Increase awareness of the role of councilor’s, the contribution they make to society and how to become a Councillor.

Potential Actions	Proposed Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting the role of a Councillor and the work of the Council • Work with the Vale’s Community Cohesion groups and Equality Forum to ensure links with ‘Becoming a Councillor page’ are promoted. 	<p>Affording new Members with the opportunity to take forward a Mentoring scheme to assist new Councillors undertake their roles. This has been traditionally done within each political group. However, support and information will be provided by Democratic Services to the new cohort of Members as part of a comprehensive induction programme.</p> <p>Following the easing of lock down restrictions and when safe to do so take forward the opportunity for the promotion of ‘open invites’ (fresher events) to the Chamber for potential candidates to they become familiar with part of their future role.</p> <p>Promotion of the role of a Councillor could be circulated to established groups and groups the Council has traditionally found hard to reach and extended to other groups e.g. School Governors who are often already active within their local communities, under-represented and seldom heard groups.</p>

Objective 4: Increase confidence of councillors that they are valued, expectations placed on them are fair and that their remuneration levels appropriately reflect the work undertaken	
Potential Actions	Proposed Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure appropriate training and support is in place to support Councillors in their role to give confidence in what they do. • To provide the opportunity for mentoring of newly elected Members • Ensure Members are provided with suitable electronic devices and training on such devices to support them in their role. • Advise of the remuneration available • Promote family absence provisions. • To survey Members during and at the end of their term of office, including encouraging Members to engage and participate in Welsh Government / WLGA surveys which are periodically undertaken during their terms of office. 	<p>Ensure that the Member induction programme is fit for purpose and 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. The Head of Democratic Services works closely with the Head of Organisational Development to ensure Members are supported through training opportunities.</p> <p>To provide the opportunity for mentoring for Newly Elected Members. Head of Democratic Services to liaise with WLGA regarding the mentoring programme.</p> <p>Roll out the provision of Council devices for Members and Co-opted Members.</p> <p>Ensure Members are provided with suitable training on such devices to assist them going forward.</p> <p>To promote the IRPW remuneration that are available to Members on the Council website and to candidates standing for Election by linking with the Council Business page. To be highlighted at candidate “fresher” sessions.</p> <p>Details to be provided to candidates and again promoted following election. (Include Reimbursement of Cost of Care).</p> <p>To review the support / barriers that may have been experienced by a Member during their term of office. Such a review will help the Council going forward to resolve any issues to assist Members in their role.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To promote the ‘open door policy’ for all Members to seek support from the Head of Democratic Services and Democratic Services. • Promote a healthy work / life balance which balances the need to be active in their communities with maintain a home life. • Promote the WLGA’s online “Councillor Guide” for the 2022 elections and the suite of National E learning modules specifically developed for Members. • Undertake a diversity and inclusion survey with Members. 	<p>To ensure Members are advised of the support available to them through Democratic Services and the Head of Democratic Services – providing contact details at the earliest opportunity during the Member Induction.</p> <p>Make it clear to candidates and Councillors that Members should not be required to publish their home addresses on the Authority’s website. We will promote hybrid working so that Members can attend meetings in person or virtually.</p> <p>To be promoted on the Council website and as part of information included in candidate packs for LG Election 2022.</p> <p>To undertake post LG Elections 2022 with the purpose of providing a benchmark for future elections. Further survey to be undertaken shortly before the 2027 LG Elections to provide feedback and review of support / barriers that may have been experienced by a Member during their term of office.</p>
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Objective 5: Greater respect and support for those standing for and securing elected office in Wales.

Potential Actions	Proposed Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place a duty on political group leaders to promote high standards of conduct 	<p>Opportunity to take forward discussions with Group Leaders to promote diversity and inclusion principles within political parties’ selection processes including advice available to all individual considering standing for office at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>Promote the Code of Conduct within their parties.</p> <p>Political groups consider appointing Diversity Champions.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Media training to be provided to Members and offer of such training to future candidates • Future Member Development 	<p>Social Media training to be delivered to Members through the Member Induction programme and built upon during a Member’s term of office. Also new E Learning suite to be promoted</p> <p>Further training to Members to include equality, diversity and inclusion training on aspects such as unconscious bias and menopause training and the need to ensure the training opportunities delivered to Council staff are also provided to Members.</p> <p>Undertaking a Member’s survey to gauge Member’s feedback induction programme to identify any actions to address training opportunities available.</p>
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