

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

SUBJECT: Diversity in Local Democracy MEETING: Democratic Services Committee DATE: 7th June 2021 DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: N/A

1. PURPOSE:

To consider an action plan and once agreed to make a recommendation to Full Council that Monmouthshire County Council commits to becoming a Diverse Council as set out by the WLGA.

2. KEY ISSUES:

At its meeting on the 28th September 2018, WLGA Council committed to advance gender equality and diversity in local democracy ahead of the 2022 local elections. As such a cross party working group was formed to explore issues and actions that could be developed to improve diversity in local democracy.

WLGA Council received and approved the report of this cross party working group in early 2021 and identified three areas for action:

- Encouraging Councils to ensure all councillors receive their full entitlement to allowances and salaries and encouraging the introduction of resettlement grants, so that all members receive fair remuneration for their work and that the role of member is not limited to those who can afford it
- An agreement by Council to undertake new or developed work in this area and visibly commit to this by signing up to becoming Diverse Councils.
- To discuss positions and making representation to political parties and acting locally to set quotas and/or voluntary targets for the election of councillors from underrepresented groups.

Monmouthshire County Council has limited or no control over some aspects of the recommendations such as the way in which political parties put forward their candidates for election and the issue of providing resettlement grants to senior salary post holders who are not successful in getting re-elected. Further information on these proposals will be provided at a future meeting of the committee should they take effect.

This report focusses solely on the request for all Councils to commit to being a Diverse Council by July 2021 and the actions needed to demonstrate the work that is/will be undertaken to support that commitment.

Attached at appendix A to this report is an example declaration and list of actions for consideration of the committee to support this

commitment should the Committee wish to make a recommendation to Full Council to sign up to the Diverse Council program.

3. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

Limited resource implications. Most of the requirements of the pledge are already being undertaken or scheduled to take place already.

4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:

In signing up to be a Diverse Council, the Council is ensuring candidates and local representatives from all backgrounds are able to stand for election and represent the views of their communities. The more diverse the Council can be, the more diverse and wide ranging policies and decisions taken by the Council will become and better reflect the communities those decisions effect.

5. SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS:

None

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[WLGA Report - Diversity in Local Government](#)

7. AUTHOR:

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Appendix A – Example Diverse Council Declaration

This Council commits to being a Diverse Council. We agree to:

Commitment	What do we do? Actions needed?
Provide a clear public commitment to improving diversity in democracy	Action: Democratic Services Committee to make a recommendation to the next Full Council meeting requesting the council sign up as a Diverse Council underpinned by the actions here.
Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all, promoting the highest standards of behaviour and conduct	Diversity ambassadors to promote the standards within their own groups as well group leaders adhering to the expected levels of behaviour as set out in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
<p>Set out a local Diverse Council Action Plan ahead of the 2022 local elections including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint a Diversity Ambassador for each political group on the Council to work with each other and local party associations to encourage recruitment of candidates from under represented groups • Encourage and enable people from underrepresented groups to stand for office through the provision of activities such as mentoring and shadowing programmes and information and learning events for people interested in standing and official candidates • Proactive engagement and involvement with local community groups and partner organisations supporting and representing under represented groups. • Ensure that all members and candidates complete the Welsh Government candidates and councillors survey distributed at election time. • Set ambitious targets for candidates from under-represented groups at the 2022 local elections. 	<p>Action: appoint a Diversity Ambassador from the Democratic Services Committee membership for each political group who can feed back updates on progress for committee to monitor and review?</p> <p>Shadowing and mentoring to be considered as part of the induction plan and preparation for the 2022 local elections. Needs political group involvement and buy in and relies on candidates being re-elected to follow through on mentoring programme.</p> <p>At 2012 and 2017 elections, pre-election briefings held with potential candidates to provide details on election process and highlight duties/expectations/commitments needed of a Councillor. Chair of DSC to attend sessions to give personal experience of being a councillor to potential candidates. Work with other departments to promote sessions as widely as possible.</p> <p>A copy of the survey is given to all candidates who submit a nomination paper to stand for election and it can be filled in online. As much as its promoted and followed up response levels have been low at both 2012 and 2017 elections.</p> <p>What would an ideal target be for Monmouthshire? Should there be a national target or local targets?</p>
Work towards the standards for member support and development set out in the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development.	Significant work was undertaken in 2019 to evidence work to apply for charter status with the WLGA but work was halted due to the general election, preparations for the 2020 PCC election

	<p>and the pandemic.</p> <p>At the time the only additional evidence required to achieve charter status was below and can be prepared as part of this commitment.</p> <p>A1. Role descriptions for Scrutiny Co-optees and member champions</p> <p>A2 and A3. Attendance records for training</p> <p>B1 Minutes of the DS committee in November when available</p> <p>B2 evidence of PDRs having taken place for Senior salary holders</p> <p>B3 a copy of the annual training programme</p> <p>B7 some evidence of a budget for member development</p>
<p>Demonstrate a commitment to a duty of care for Councillors by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing access to counselling services for all councillors • Having regard for the safety and wellbeing of councillors whenever they are performing their role as councillors. • Taking a zero tolerance approach to bullying and harassment by members including through social network. 	<p>A dedicated Health and Safety area for members is included in the member area on the hub here: Democratic Services - Health and Safety</p> <p>All members can access the Councils counselling services already through Democratic Services.</p> <p>A recent survey of members was undertaken to identify levels of abuse/harassment members receive in their role. Thankfully, incidents in Monmouthshire are currently very low but the Head of Democratic Services and the Monitoring Officer can support members in dealing with any issues that arise.</p>
<p>Provide flexibility in council business by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly reviewing and staggering meeting times • Encouraging and supporting remote attendance at meetings • Agreeing recess periods to support councillors with caring or work commitments 	<p>The timing of Full Council meetings are reviewed through the Democratic Services Committee at least once every term of Council (twice this term).</p> <p>Committees and Committee Chairs are given the flexibility to adjust their meeting times as they see fit in achieving the outcomes they wish to achieve.</p> <p>The Council Constitution was amended around 2015 to allow remote attendance at Council meetings subject to certain conditions. New legislation allows councillors to attend meetings remotely without the conditions attached to it and members are provided with the equipment and skills to participate remotely where they wish to do so.</p> <p>The Council diary is already drafted with school holiday periods defined as a period for not allocating meetings where possible and coupled</p>

	with the conditions above on timings of meetings allow members/committees to influence the meeting diary to suit their needs.
Ensure that all members take up the allowances and salaries to which they are entitled, particularly any reimbursement for costs of care, so that all members receive fair remuneration for their work and that the role of member is not limited to those who can afford it	<p>All members automatically receive the allowance they are entitled to, as set out by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, with exceptions only made at the request of individual members.</p> <p>In publishing the details of allowances, a total cost of care across all members is published rather than itemised against each councillor to encourage members to claim the costs they are entitled to.</p>
Ensure that councillors from under-represented groups are represented whenever possible in high profile, high influence roles.	This would be a role the Diversity Ambassador from each political group would feed into their own groups to encourage appointments to different roles the group are entitled to are distributed with this in mind.