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**Cross Party Group on Women**

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**Women, Diversity & Local Government & Elections Bill – Amendments**

**Sponsored by Siân Gwenllian MS and Suzy Davies MS**

**18<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

**Zoom**

**Attendees:**

*Sian Gwenllian MS*  
*Hilary Watson WEN Wales*  
*Jackie Jones Women in Europe (Wales)*  
*(Speaker)*  
*Cllr Mary Sherwood (Speaker)*  
*Leena Farhat (Speaker)*  
*Prof Sarah Childs (Speaker)*  
*Mia Rees office of Suzy Davies MS*  
*Ele Hicks Diverse Cymru*  
*Leigh Ingham Plan International UK*  
*Katerina Stivasari-Jones consultant/WEN*  
*Mentee*  
*Lori Frat WEN Mentee*  
*Rhian A Davies Theatr Genedlaethon Cymru*  
*Liz Hill O'Shea WEN Mentee*  
*Patience Bentu Race Council Cymru*  
*Sioned Jones office of Siân Gwenllian MS*  
*Katie Cooke*  
*Emma Wilde WEN Mentee*  
*Toni Beardmore*  
*Sara Kirkpatrick Welsh Women's Aid*  
*Beth Thomas The Big Issue*  
*Helen Parfitt office of Helen Mary Jones MS*  
*Diana Stirbu London Metropolitan University*  
*Deborah Shaffer FTWW*  
*Jane Fenton-May Wales Assembly of Women*  
*Sarah Rees office of Bethan Sayed MS*  
*Sophie Weeks WEN Mentee*  
*Abbie Winsor Aberystwyth University*  
*Polly Winn Chwarae Teg*

**Apologies:**

*Suzy Davies MS*  
*Catherine Fookes WEN Wales*  
*Maria Constanza Mesa Women Connect First*  
*Alison Parken Cardiff Business School*  
*Rachel Minto Cardiff University*  
*Delyth Jewell MS*  
*Mike Hedges MS*  
*Helen Mary Jones MS*  
*Llyr Gruffydd MS*  
*Angela Burns MS*  
*Jess Williams WEN Mentee*  
*Nia Thomas ERS Cymru*

### Minutes

Siân Gwenllian MS, chair of the meeting welcomed attendees and informs the group of Suzy Davis MS's apologies.

- Attendees and apologies listed by Hilary Watson

### Jackie Jones – Women in Europe (Wales) update

- 14 days left to ask for Brexit transition period extension. Important for women's rights in relation to EU rights
- European Women's Lobby: Asking for 50% for any recovery funds from COVID-19 from EU budget to be spent on women and girls. May be something for organisations to consider adopting a similar policy – recognising the contribution of women and girls during pandemic.
- UN Conference on the Future of Europe – Europe (not just EU). Different conference events going round: European conferences to decide what EU and Europe to look like. Individuals and organisations taking part. Group should ask Welsh Government to be involved in these.

Any questions can be emailed to Jackie Jones – contact [hilary@wenwales.org.uk](mailto:hilary@wenwales.org.uk) to be put in touch.

### Women, Diversity & Local Government & Elections Bill – Amendments – Chairs give context to the bill and discussion

- 1) **Cllr Mary Sherwood** – Councillor in Job-Share for Welsh Labour in Swansea Council
  - *Mary Sherwood's paper, previously submitted Job-Sharing Cabinet Positions in Swansea: Report to the Senedd Equalities, Local Government & Communities Committee "Diversity in Local Government" to be circulated: it summarises the first two years of job-sharing as a councilor.*
  - *Swansea pioneered job-sharing for cabinet roles. For local councillor role – part time role – a job-share wouldn't make sense as it was for half available pay. Cabinet role is different. Reality is that it can be a role with boundless responsibility so have to draw boundaries of what you're willing to do. Where various office environments adapt to part-time workers, in the political context, most people aren't working part time and your job-share partner can't necessarily cover for you because of political responsibility.*



- *It's necessary to show political leadership with individual responsibility – without diminishing one another. Main overwhelming issue is that there's no guidance for full time hours, let alone for job-share. End up getting involved in full time but for half the pay.*
  - *Bill specifically sets a number of executive number of people you can have in cabinet. Reinforces 'niceness' of job-sharing. Cabinets restricting how many job-sharing opportunities are makes job-sharing 'other'. Mary would like to see that changed. Portfolios seen as 'really important' won't be job shared. Areas seen as 'of interest' to women or minority groups would be the cabinets shared.*
  - *For last two years, there have been four individuals job-sharing in Swansea cabinet. Only 1 of 4 was a women. The other three are younger men, as they don't want to give up their jobs –but doesn't bring more women, people with disabilities or other groups.*
  - *Fundamentally we need to look more at whole working culture around political roles and really tackle how stepping up for political office, public see you as a political punchbag, never off duty, open to receiving abuse. Why should politics be the preserver of those with a thick skin? Privileged people with easier life are the ones likely to have thick skin. Those with resilience may be thick skinned but also have battle fatigue.*
  - *Connected theme– in politics we are encouraged to image the best person for job. People seem to think that quotas etc. block getting 'the best person for job'. This attitude promotes arrogance. Effective policy is created by a diversity of people – a team lacking diversity is a weak team. Skill gaps in politics are lived experiences. e.g. womanhood, disability, ethnic minority. Councils must be proud about the search to fill those gaps.*
- 2) Prof Sarah Childs** – Professor of Politics and Gender at the Royal Holloway & member of the Expert Panel on Electoral Reform – Senedd
- *Lots of sympathy with a lot of what Mary says. Arbitrary to limit the number in the exec in Bill. Total number is irrelevant. Mary is right in suggesting there is no one solution to the lack of diversity. Need a permissive environment, including quotas. Sarah still thinks there is still a possibility of job share for all political roles, not just exec. Social media violence against women and how parties organise need looking at. The Bill offers the possibility of pilots. These need to be taken up. Diverse council is good council – parties don't necessarily think this yet.*
  - *Job share – permissiveness. While working part time for half the pay may be*



*unappealing for some it might make sense for others. Looking at the House of Commons in relation to job share Sarah's thoughts were around whether it would encourage more women to participate. She then became more concerned by those with disabilities who may never be able to be full time. Fundamental democratic right to participate in politics – some people may have to do this part time as full time wouldn't be possible. Politics seen as 24/7 – wouldn't want that to limit some who couldn't do this. Possibility of a pilot for elected role. There you might want to make a limit – try in area for a few people to get some experience. Many say it wouldn't work but we don't know as it hasn't been done or studied.*

- *Quotas – where local authorities are deciding changing mode of election – perhaps would want to reconsider amendment – where a local area is going to change electoral system must undertake some sort of gender and equality impact audit – can councils show what else is going to happen to deliver a more diverse group of people? Or an amendment could be as specific as calling for the use of quotas. Commitment to change is needed with other things in place. Important to try to tie change to better diversity outcomes. Reinforces good council is diverse council (in support of Mary's argument).*
- *Maternity/Paternity/Parental leave – not in bill. To what extent is that in place in Wales – should be looked into.*
- *Where there is greater diversity – enabling interventions. Funding available – access to elected office funding for example. Publicity campaigns – to what extent is that going to focus on diverse groups of individuals and communities, to make sure new systems reflects and responds to them. Close reading of the bill would be useful. How can we attach to various parts of the bill to increase diversity? Ask – is this speaking to women? Other groups? How can this be altered? Where places will shift system, to what extent will political parties need training to improve?*

**3) Leena Farhat** – candidate, Welsh Liberal Democrat, based in Aberystwyth

- *Leena is looking to stand as a councillor in West Wales – more rural area of Wales. Will put her name forward to stand in 2022 – if elections go ahead. Have to do groundwork if you're going for election. Having read local gov bill she was quite impressed by what was in the bill. Thought – how an adaption of the electoral system could impact on diversity work we do in Wales for women and different types of diversity. Remember when started to put name forward, experienced a male putting himself forward who is neurodiverse and how he spoke out passionately about that. It was a blow when he still missed out.*
- *Also noted the lack of maternal/paternal. Highlighted other caring responsibilities and*



would like to see more allocation. Realistically many people do have caring responsibilities – whether they call themselves carers or not and these responsibilities would take time out of council work. Could enable you to structure your day with job-share.

- Getting people through the door has to come from all political parties – Leena also acknowledges the great number of independent candidates in Wales. Have to counter arguments with friends and families about whether you would have time to stand. No reason you can't ask a local party to help you out – not only with money but 'silly things'. May ask if there's someone there to help with caring responsibilities, so candidate/councillor can do surgery etc.
- What are the actual barriers and what are the long term solutions that we can lay out to enable people to represent community? Groundwork we're really lacking in Welsh politics. Diversity review within local council so important and could enable the Bill to be implemented very well. That sort of enquiry – what we need to do better to increase diversity really important.

Chair Siân Gwenllïan MS states that sometimes as women we have to say to ourselves, just do it. Had to push self rather than saying 'we need more women' without doing it ourselves.

#### **Discussion:**

- Audience member, interested in being involved in local government asked why is it taking so long for change to happen in local government. She lives in Ceredigion and stated that there's no diversity in her own councillors. System needs to change. If she were to approach, system is so used to working in such an excluding way, she doesn't think she could go very far with it.
- Chair reiterates this is the question we are all asking. She stated that personally, we have to have quotas and mechanisms in place. Have to make the change happen. Hopefully the Bill can be amended to put more of that into it. We do really need to push for that kind of change to happen. If we can have quota system in Wales that would make a huge difference – we can see that in counties around the work. Putting mechanism defiantly there as things have to happen then.
- Others stated that participation in local government is very low. Minimal number of people vote. New councillors go in, determined to change system and very quickly get mired by bureaucracy and red tape. Need to make the system more accessible to everyone – welcome the parts of the bill that do look at that. Having constitution written out in normal language isn't enough. Have to do outreach, have to fill local meeting etc.



*Councils don't know how to reach out and engage people. Proportional – may increase interest. 'Safe pair of hands' is going to get in, no point voting. Not sure STV will make much difference in small wards but may make people feel less like their vote is pointless. Pick one system – multiple systems across councils is confusing.*

- *Jackie Jones mentioned a recent Zoom meeting on CEDAW and COVID-19: What would the world have looked like if CEDAW had been implemented if when UK ratified it in the 80s. It would be so more egalitarian. CEDAW is a blueprint for how we should be organising our society. could be utilised. What the world would look like if the state had implemented legal obligation to get rid of any barrier which stops women from having equal representation in society.*
- *Chair asked whether STV was needed before we could have quotas. Sarah Childs states that any system can have a quota designed for it. Can be very successful FPTP with quotas. Scotland and Wales – where the parties who were going to win selected their women. It's not correct to simply state that FPTP doesn't work for women, PR will solve problems for women – not the case.*
- *1997 – Westminster – Labour used all-female shortlists, with women in winnable seats. Scotland and Wales, pairing in constituency seats. Women – elected where their parties knew they were going to win.*
- *Sarah Childs believes that quota systems need penalties. Irish Republic – funding connected to percentage of women elected. District magnitude. If your party is going to win one seat and your woman is always second on the list, she'll never get elected. For this reason it is more complicated for smaller parties. Need to have a certain size of constituency but it's also about knowing how many seats you're going to win. So much is about changing parties. Need rules to force parties who have habits of selecting certain types of candidates (privileged, thick skinned candidates). Sarah is more persuaded we need rule change – the stick is better than the carrot.*
- *Chair asked whether there is room in the bill to mandate political parties. Sarah stated that she saw very general commitments. Electoral Panel recommendations were very specific. Sarah stated that if it is not on the face of the Bill it will go back to permissive legislation, e.g. allowing labour to use women short list. Much more in favour of prescriptive quota legislation.*
- *Audience member stated that in local government there is a lack of transparency. Core transparency hasn't really been dealt with. This Bill shows a really clear ways of making sure the info in the public domain is truly accessible, rather than just being put online in a totally inaccessible way.*



- *Leena agreed that things need to be accessible. We live in a multi-lingual society. Some of our communities don't speak English or Welsh. We need to reach out to people in all communities. No surprise they don't take part in politics in Wales. They might not know how, might not know the remit of what councillors do. We also have to remember we're bringing a new generation of voters into the next election – with votes from 16. When we look at how we structure information and the responsibilities parties we have to include everyone, not just those who want to stand now.*
- *Chair concludes the meeting: We have a real opportunity to influence the way we do politics in Wales. 28% councillors are women. It's high time for that to start changing – not only because it's completely unfair but by having women there, it's good for women everywhere. If you have women in decision making places the issues that confront us in our lives in*
- *Chairs to discuss having a ballot send to Cross Party Group on future topics for discussion at future meetings.*

**Comments from Chat box:**

- *If it is option and depends on people wanting to change their election system locally that they need to do a diversity audit, there is high chance that they will choose to keep status quo to keep their friends in a post.*
- *Recommendation of YouTube talk and book by Stephanie Kelton about costs and benefits*
- *Sarah Childs is currently working on a new Commonwealth Women's Parliamentary guidelines on gender sensitive parliaments - these 'standards' and accompanying checklist could be adopted by councils or 'model' council to really capture what's wrong with the council. She will send this on- expect it out in the summer.*
  - *Another question to ask of the Bill: is what lessons have been learnt during Covid-19 parliamentary adaption that revises the conclusions in the current bill*
  - *in her opinion SC stated that many of the 'problems' with virtual participation have simply been shown to be the preferences of those who like to do politics in person. That's her reflection on UK Parliament but imagine it holds elsewhere too*
  - *another route to party change, is party regulation, ie whatever parties benefit from the state could be linked to their % of women candidates/councillors/MS*



Cynulliad National  
Cenedlaethol Assembly for  
Cymru Wales

- *Council meetings used to be report regularly in local papers now quite difficult to find out what happens. Lots seems to be restricted*
- <https://www.beacouncillor.wales/> – *Seeks to explain the role and functions of local councillors to inspire people to participate and stand.*
- *Concerns raised about how are we adapting the citizenship agenda to make it inclusive to young people*

**Actions:**

- Secretary to circulate Mary Sherwood's paper '*Job-Sharing Cabinet Positions in Swansea: Report to the Equalities, Local Government & Communities Committee "Diversity in Local Government" Inquiry*'; and UN Women: '*A Primer for Parliamentary Action - Gender Sensitive Responses to COVID-19*', which Sarah Childs co-authored.
- Charis and secretary to look at future topics for group and discuss setting up a ballot for members to vote on what they feel we should be discussing in the future

**The Chair thanked all for attending and the meeting closed at 15:00**