

**P-05-706 Keep our Councils Rejuvenated by Introducing a Fixed Term.
Correspondence – Petitioner to the Committee 31.08.2016**

Petition P-05-706 / Petitions Committee 13/09/2016

This proposal is being put forward to ensure we maintain a flow of new energy into our councils so that communities can continue to move forward, adapt, grow and develop. Without a formal structure at a governance level which states that elected cabinet and council members can only remain in post for a maximum of 2 terms (8 years) within our local authorities, we will not see this taking place. It is important for the future health and wellbeing of our communities that we adopt a system of renewal and change that will provide a continuous cycle of local representatives that will bring new ideas and enthusiasm to our communities. It will also provide an opportunity for Wales to develop a new generation of young politicians.

I understand that some consultation had been undertaken on a similar subject some time ago. However, I am uncertain if this consultation was of a public nature, or with the elected members themselves. If the latter, then this not a true consultation process.

I am also revising this proposal in light of the implementation of the Future Generations Act (2015).

A Diverse Wales Requires Diverse Representation

We are now living in a diverse Wales, yet ironically our “representatives” at local government in no way reflect this with the majority of local authority councillors being white males aged 60+. With less than 30% of councillors being female and with 99% of councillors being white, this is a statistic that in no way reflects the population of Wales and questions the promotion of equality. By maintaining the indefinite period, this allows little flexibility for this to change.

Table of Comparative Survey Data

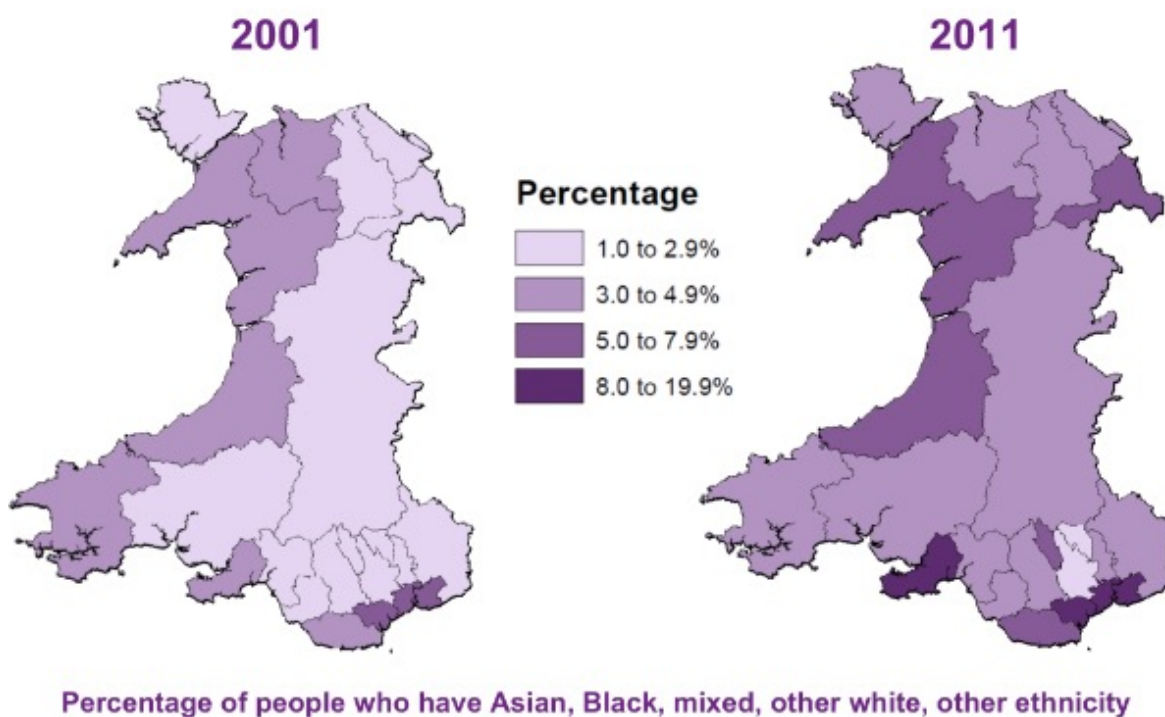
| | Wales | England | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|------------------------------------|-------|------------------|----------|------------------|
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 72% | 68.5% | 69.6% | 76% |
| Female | 28% | 30.6% | 30.4% | 24% |
| Age | | | | |
| 18-29 years | 2.1% | 2.4% | 3.2% | 7% |
| 30-39 years | 4.7% | 5.3% | 6.7% | 10% |
| 40-49 years | 11.3% | 11% | 16.6% | 20% |
| 50-59 years | 25.4% | 21.9% | 28.3% | 27% |
| 60-69 years | 38.8% | 40.3% | 38.2% | 25% |
| 70-79 years | 17% | 19.1% | 6.7% | 9% |
| 80+ years | 1% | | 03.% | |
| Ethnicity | | | | |
| White | 99% | 96.3% | 96.6% | 100% |
| African | | | 0.6% | |
| Asian | | | 1.3% | |
| Mixed/Multiple ethnic group | 1% | 3.6% | 1.6% | |
| Religion | | NOT ASKED | | |
| Christian | 83% | | 49.9% | 100% |
| Other | 2% | | 4.3% | |
| None/no reply | 15% | | 45.6% | |
| Sexual Orientation | | | | NOT ASKED |
| Heterosexual | 97% | 84.2% | | |
| Gay or lesbian | 3% | 3.3% | | |
| Bisexual | | | | |
| Other | <1% | 0.3% | | |
| Prefer not to say | | 12.2% | | |
| Married/same sex civil partnership | | | 72.3% | |

On Balance: Diversifying Democracy in Local Government in Wales, 2014

Demographics from 2011 Census

| Welsh resident population by broad age range | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------|-------------|-----------|----------|---------|---------|--------|-------|--------|---------------------|
| | Total population | Under 16 | 16-24 | 25-44 | 45-64 | 65+ | | | | |
| Number | 3,063,456 | 556,296 | 373,867 | 756,622 | 814,118 | 562,544 | | | | |
| % | 100 | 18 | 12 | 25 | 27 | 18 | | | | |
| Welsh residents by gender | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Total population | Male | Females | | | | | | | |
| Number | 3,063,456 | 1,504,228 | 1,559,228 | | | | | | | |
| % | 100 | 49 | 51 | | | | | | | |
| Welsh residents by religion | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Total population | No Religion | Christian | Buddhist | Hindu | Jewish | Muslim | Sikh | Other | Religion not stated |
| Number | 3,063,456 | 982,997 | 1,763,299 | 9,117 | 10,434 | 2,064 | 45,950 | 2,962 | 12,705 | 233,928 |
| % | 100 | 32 | 58 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.07 | 1.5 | 0.1 | 0.4 | 7.6 |
| Stats Wales (2016) 2011 Census Results | | | | | | | | | | |

Growing ethnic diversity



Wales Race Forum, 2013.

This inequality must also have some impact on the level of interest and turnout at the polls; if the typical councillor is 60+ white male, can they relate to their potential voters such as the younger generation or those of different ethnicity and/or religion? Likewise, do the potential voters feel that they can relate to their councillor? This would answer the steady decline in the number of voters as the voting generation appears to be moving in alignment with the age of the councillor.

Not surprisingly, there has been little change in this local government structure for decades and coincidentally, neither has the level of poverty. If progress is not being made, then something needs to be changed.

I also believe that Wales is a state-dependant country. Its population (especially within its more deprived communities), has become dependent on state provision, whether it be financially via benefits and/or becoming over-dependent on services (both at a significant cost to the economy). So entrenched is the culture of having decisions made *for* them and services delivered *to* them that they have not only lost their voice, but they don't know that they have one. Evidence of this can be seen by the justification of BIG Lottery's Community Voice project throughout the country and/or the increased co-production initiatives that have significantly increased in the recent years. The Future Generation Act of 2015 encourages more community participation in not only decision making, but involvement. This can be alien to a number of long-standing councillors who have subconsciously deferred to an autocratic nature, rather than the democratic process that they represent. Therefore, like with any private organisation, a change in organisation culture usually requires a change in leader.

Length of Service

In addition to inequality, the current length of service also hinders development. It is now not uncommon for councillors to serve 10, 15 or even more than 20 years. Enabling councillors to remain in their position indefinitely leads to councillors becoming entrenched in their posts long after they have lost their effectiveness, long after other people have recognised that they should have stepped down and personal status and

campaigns take precedence over the needs of their constituency. This leads to people losing faith in politics and encourages a “nothing will ever change” culture that has contributed to, and will continue to contribute to the demise of some political parties in some regions. It also contributes to parties becoming less effective as people lose faith in the democratic system and the next generation doesn’t bother getting involved in politics as they can’t see a way through and therefore we don’t get effective opposition. It’s not that we have a limited pool of potential candidates, there’s simply no encouragement with opportunities being far and few between and an old school system that is counter-productive to engaging younger/new candidates. A lack of challenge results in a lack of drive and creates complacency and stagnation.

I understand that in 2012, 100 councillors were elected unopposed. Was this due to the amazing job that they were doing? Was it because other candidates believed that standing up against entrenched individuals (regardless of their political activity) was futile? Or was it because no-one cared? No opposition at such scale does not imply a democratic state.

Proposal

Wales has been a poor nation for too long and in order to tackle poverty, Welsh Government needs to impose a more radical and dynamic approach to engage our citizens; until now, a “do to”/ top-down culture has created a state-dependent population that are needlessly and subliminally using resources at an economic and social cost to the country. If we are to truly embed the Future Generations Act (2015), we need to work more co-productively and fully involve communities. At present, the current local government structure contradicts this – how can we have “A more equal Wales” (Future Generations Act, 2015), with local government having the aforementioned unequal representation? By implementing a fixed term for local government, this will encourage continuous improvement and enthuse wider community participation in local politics.

With wider participation come more skills and experience. Therefore, if councillors are truly committed to supporting their community and local

party, they could still do so in a mentor/consultancy/voluntary capacity, thus maintaining their level of expertise and still valuing their contribution.

If shorter terms cannot be taken forward, then another method of measuring the performance of councillors should be introduced and I encourage the following propositions:-

- There needs to be more promotion to encourage people with new energy and new ideas to let them know that they are welcome in local politics and that there is a viable route for their engagement.
- I also believe that there should be more formal structures made to encourage young people and women into politics.
- More accessible training courses, for all levels of ability in order to gain an understanding and create more community activism.
- Regular mandatory training for existing councillors.
- The establishment of a mentoring scheme.
- The establishment of local specialist boards that feed local and relevant information to the councillor, comprising of different expertise and specialisms.
- A mechanism for the public to report poor performance of their local councillor with independent enquiries to take place thereon.

I am fully supportive of the Future Generations Act and feel proud of our nation for adopting it. However, its ethos needs to be embedded right across our culture, starting with local governance.

Kind Regards

Paul Stepczak