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SP 26

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb,  
Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau  
Priorities for the Equality,  
Local Government and Communities Committee  
Ymateb gan: Electoral Reform Society Cymru  
Response from: Electoral Reform Society Cymru



John Griffiths AM  
Chair, Equalities, Local Government & Communities Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay, CF99 1NA

Sent by email to: SeneddCommunities@assembly.wales

Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2016

Dear John,

### **Consultation on committee's future work programme**

Congratulations on your recent election as committee chair. The Electoral Reform Society (ERS) Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the committee's consultation on its future work programme. ERS Cymru is an independent, membership-based organisation that campaigns for a stronger democracy in Wales. Over the last five years we have focused our work on: strengthening devolution; renewing local government; and promoting diversity in public life.

ERS Cymru recommends that the committee considers two subjects as part of its future work programme.

#### **1. Local government re-organisation and reform.**

We agree that this subject should form part of the committee's future work programme.

We believe such an inquiry should investigate:

- a. The role and responsibilities of local government in Wales (both principal/unitary authorities, and town and community councils);
- b. How scrutiny and accountability within local authorities can be strengthened. This includes consideration of the role of backbench councillors and how council executives can be more effectively held to account in the leader/cabinet model;
- c. How, if mergers go ahead, decision-making within local authorities can be devolved to communities (exploration of initiatives like area boards) overcoming the centralising effects of larger authorities;
- d. Citizen engagement and participation in local government decision making;

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- e. The voting system used to elect local councillors in Wales, and consideration of adopting the Single Transferable Vote (as was recommended by the Sunderland Commission in 2003);
- f. Democratic accountability within City Regions/City Deals in Wales.

## **2. Diversity in decision-making.**

Whilst the last government has made some progress in supporting the implementation of the recommendations of the independent inquiry into diversity in public life, chaired by Prof. Laura McAllister; there is still much work to be done. Ensuring greater diversity amongst elected representatives is only one side of the coin: with greater powers being devolved to communities, it is vital that every citizen's voice is heard regardless of any protected characteristic.

ERS Cymru therefore recommends that the committee considers instigating a review that investigates how citizens with protected characteristics can be more involved in local decision-making.

Such a review would explore:

- a. The effectiveness of the Welsh Government's 'Diversity in Democracy' project;
- b. How barriers are removed and improvements made so that people with disabilities are able to participate democratically;
- c. How LGBT people are supported within political parties to stand for election, and outside of elected politics, put themselves forward for public appointments;
- d. How public institutions in Wales are performing in-terms of paying due regard to the needs of citizens and elected representatives which arise from their faith or religious belief; and the level to which public institutions are maintaining a continual pro-active dialogue with faith groups;
- e. How citizenship and political rights feature within Welsh Government-funded social inclusion programmes for BME groups;
- f. How refugees and asylum seekers are being included in the design and delivery of public services.

We hope the committee is able to include these two subjects within its future work programme and I look forward to reading the conclusions of the committee's consultation.

Yours sincerely,

**Steve Brooks**  
**Director, Electoral Reform Society Cymru**