

**Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee**  
**Inquiry into Diversity in Local Government - *Evidence from Welsh Labour***

**Welsh Labour's approach**

1. Welsh Labour welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to this inquiry. The Party's values are underpinned by a commitment to a more just society and a more open democracy and, accordingly, aiming to improve diversity in local government is a crucial part of the work we do. A total of 472 Welsh Labour councillors were elected in the most recent round of local elections in Wales in 2017 and, while we have done much to improve diversity amongst our councillors, we recognise that there is still much more that can be done.
2. With the next round of local elections in Wales set to take place in 2022, we are at a crucial juncture in being able to positively influence our selection processes in order to attract a more diverse set of representatives. To this end, we have already put a number of strategies in place to help us in this aim.
3. Welsh Government research has found that in the 2017 local elections, only 33 per cent of all county councillors were female.<sup>1</sup> Amongst the political parties, Welsh Labour was found to be by far the most representative, with 39 per cent of elected councillors being female.<sup>2</sup> While we welcome this progress, we recognise that the proportion is still not high enough, and we need to do more to achieve parity at the very least.
4. Welsh Labour is committed to more positive action to encourage and enable more people with protected characteristics to come forward and play our part in ensuring that there is more diversity in local government. The drive to recruit a more diverse pool of councillors has often been focused on encouraging more women to stand and this work remains essential. We are, however, very aware that there are a number of other groups underrepresented in local government. We need more BAME, LGBT+ and disabled councillors, as well as younger councillors and more councillors from working class backgrounds. All stakeholders in local government should be acting to empower and enable people from these backgrounds to stand as candidates.
5. Welsh Labour recognises that increasing the diversity of its candidates and councillors is part of a longer process of improving the diversity of its membership and activists. The recent rapid growth in Labour Party membership will assist with this and we are making specific efforts at local and national level to welcome and

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<sup>1</sup> *Local Government Candidates Survey* <https://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2018/180502-local-government-candidates-survey-2017-en.pdf> (Cardiff: Welsh Government, 2017), p.12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.13.

involve new members. Through its Welsh Labour Democracy Review, the party is currently reviewing all of its ways of working to ensure that these help and encourage a wide range of members to engage. Local parties are being encouraged to appoint a variety of equalities officers in addition to the long-established role of Women's and Youth Officers and these may include BAME, LGBT+, Disability and other officers. Similarly many are creating committees and informal groups, alongside existing Women's Forums and Young Labour groups, through which members with protected characteristics can come together.

6. We also recognise that many other forms of public service are both valuable in themselves and can provide stepping stones towards standing for major councils, Parliament or the Assembly. In most parts of Wales, we stand Welsh Labour candidates for Town and Community Councils and we encourage local parties to stand a wide range of members for these. The party's renewed emphasis on community organising will both provide members with valuable experience of representing others and bring a wider range of people into party activity. We encourage members to consider becoming school governors and to play a full part in many community and voluntary organisations. We are proud of our long-standing relationship with the trade unions that have traditionally started many of their members on the road to public office and continue to do so today.
7. Welsh Labour has recently launched a Futures Candidates Programme, our flagship scheme for encouraging a more diverse pool of candidates in future elections, whether for the Assembly, Parliament or Local Government. The programme – now underway - is open to all members who are successful in securing a place, but has a focus on encouraging women and people from BAME backgrounds to stand in elections. In conjunction with the Welsh Labour Women's Committee, we have held a number of small events around Wales for women to encourage female members to think about standing in future elections – including local government. Similarly we have held a specific taster event for BAME members.
8. Local Campaign Forums, the bodies which co-ordinate our work in each local government area, are being encouraged to build on best practice as we look forward to the next round of local government selections and elections. In particular they are being asked to run more informal taster events, training events and mentoring schemes and to recognise the needs of underrepresented groups in general work while also creating specific, targeted opportunities for them. The Local Government Subcommittee of the Welsh Executive Committee is currently reviewing this work and the support that can be given to LCFs in delivering it. Alongside this, we are planning to build on current provision for the application of women's quotas in winnable seats.
9. Welsh Labour is also intending to launch a Welsh Labour young councillor's network for councillors in the near future, allowing our younger councillors to develop a network of supportive colleagues across Labour groups in Wales.

## The wider context

10. Councils in which groups are under-represented cannot fully reflect or deliver for the communities they serve. This would always be a problem, but it is thrown into sharper relief in straitened times, with non-diverse councils making difficult decisions on priorities in the provision of services without the full involvement of many in the community.
11. In spite of some successes on a local level, reflecting the hard work of a range of organisations, progress in electing more diverse councils in a broader sense has nevertheless been slight and far too gradual. The pace of incremental work needs to increase in order to create long term cultural and structural change.
12. A council made up of a diverse and reflective set of councillors will be better able to reflect and engage with its community, creating more trust and confidence, and resulting in better government for local communities. In short: greater diversity leads to better decisions. Furthermore, a more representative field of councillors allows individuals to see themselves represented in their council. This, in turn, will inspire future candidates to put themselves forward.
13. While being a councillor is a rewarding and fulfilling role to take on, it is also demanding and challenging and can impinge on family life and a healthy work-life balance. Constraints on time and finances and a lack of flexibility can all act as barriers to an inclusive local government. It is important to continue to review councillor remuneration to ensure more people can afford to take on the role. Councils should also seek to improve childcare provision so that those with young children are not deterred from becoming councillors.
14. Many potential councillors of working age are worried that taking on the role might impact on their job security and future promotion prospects. There needs to be a major effort to encourage employers to see that holding elected office provides an employee with valuable experience in analysing complex problems, participating in major budget decisions, interacting with a wide range of people and providing leadership. Employers should be encouraged to see acting as a councillor as a plus rather than a minus for an employee – in the same way that many actively encourage participation in the TA and charitable organisations.
15. Barriers do not begin and end with selection and election. Retention can be a problem across the board for councillors from underrepresented groups who, once elected, may find it difficult to develop the support networks needed to thrive in what can be an isolating environment. Underrepresented groups are also more likely face discrimination while in office: research by the Fawcett Society has found

that 50 per cent of female BAME councillors and 41 per cent of male BAME councillors have experienced discrimination while in office.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Does Local Government Work for Women?* <https://www.lgiu.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Does-Local-Government-Work-for-Women-Interim-Report-April-2017-Fawcett-Society.pdf>, (Fawcett Society, 2017) p.7.