

- 1.1 The Welsh Government believes that diversity in the council chamber is more than a matter of simple social justice. We believe a council membership which better reflects the communities it serves will tend to increase pluralism in decision-making, and to improve the levels of engagement between councillors and those they represent.
- 1.2 The effects of such increases in the quality of democracy may be hard to measure. We do not believe it would be realistic to expect them to lead immediately and directly to improvements in the quality, availability or cost of council services, for instance. Nonetheless, they are still vital. That is all the more important given the difficult decisions all local authorities face, and will continue to face following Brexit. Such decisions need to be grounded in the best possible evidence about community needs and priorities, and sustained by a high level of trust in local government.
- 1.3 Accordingly, the Welsh Government has long been committed to broaden and increase participation in local government and has commissioned research to understand the barriers and disincentives to standing for election to local councils. As a result of this research it has subsequently passed legislation to help remove the barriers and funded initiatives to address the disincentives.
- 1.4 However, there are clear limits to the effectiveness of such initiatives. They can only facilitate greater diversity; they cannot mandate it. Parties, candidates and electors have roles which are beyond the reach of any legislation.

2. To understand key barriers to attracting a more diverse pool of candidate for local government elections

2.1 To understand the issues, the Welsh Government, commissioned expert work to make recommendations to the Welsh Government. *Are we being served* - the report of the Councillor Commission Expert Panel in Wales headed by Sophie Howe - was submitted to the Welsh Ministers in February 2009. More recently, *On Balance* - the report of the Expert Group headed by Laura McAllister - was submitted to Welsh Ministers in 2014.

2.2 The terms of reference for the Expert Panel were to respond to the recommendations made by the Councillors Commission¹ and to also consider any other issues relevant to widening participation in local government.

The terms of reference for the Expert Group were to consider the response to the initial survey of councillors introduced by the Local Government Measure 2011 and to develop an action plan to help design policy aimed at increasing diversity.

2.3 Both reports noted the available data on the make up of councillors have consistently shown the under-representation of certain groups, specifically women, BME groups and younger people. An analysis of the evidence collected by both the Expert Panel and the Expert Group suggested the reasons for this under-representation included the time commitment, the financial commitment, the limited support within the council for non-executive members and negative portrayal in the media.

2.4 The Expert Panel report, amongst other recommendations, called on the Welsh Government to legislate for: diversity monitoring of councillors and candidates; the training and development of serving councillors; flexible working for councillors and administrative support for councillors.

2.5 The Expert Group report amongst other recommendations, called on the Welsh Government to improve diversity by improving the Candidates Survey (discussed at para 4.4) and to establish a mentoring scheme.

2.6 The Welsh Government has accepted both sets of recommendations and sought to implement them.

¹ The independent Commission on the role of local councillors, reported to Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. The Commission's report 'Representing the future' was published on 10 December 2007.

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20080906032823/http://www.communities.gov.uk/councillorscommission/publications/representingthefuture/>

3. To explore areas of innovation and good practice that may help increase diversity in local government

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

- 3.1 As part of its response to the Expert Panel report, the Welsh Government introduced (and the Assembly passed) the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. The Measure contained provisions designed to address the concerns identified by the Expert Panel report. Some of the provisions are addressed to councils, to promote more flexible working and some are addressed to councillors to improve the experience of being a councillor.
- 3.2 As a result of the Measure:
- councillors in Wales are now entitled to take a period of family absence for reasons of maternity, paternity, adoption and caring for children;
 - Councillors are entitled to record their development needs and to receive training;
 - Councils are under a duty to canvass their members on the location and timing of meetings and to put into effect the results;
 - Councils have powers to introduce remote attendance for their meetings so that councillors do not have to be present in person but are able to contribute from another location.
- 3.3 The purpose of these provisions is to promote a culture within local government that better supports councillors and to recognise that without specific support that recognises the other commitments councillors have, many potential councillors would not be able to consider standing. That includes those with caring requirements in particular.

The Candidates Survey

- 3.4 The 2011 Measure also introduced the Candidates Survey. Local authorities are under a duty to survey all candidates standing for election to principal authorities and to community and town councils. The aim is for data to be gathered to enable equality monitoring of all candidates over time.
- 3.5 The first survey was conducted following the local government elections in May 2012 and the second was conducted following the local government elections in May 2017. Following the recommendations in the report of the Expert Group, the Welsh Government reviewed the legislation and the methodology to incorporate the improvements in time to take effect for the second survey, in May 2017. The principle changes were to allow the survey to be answered electronically on-line, introducing amendments into the legislation to allow for the survey to be conducted both before and after the

election and for local authorities to make arrangements for another body to conduct it.

- 3.6 The Local Government Data Unit conducted the survey on behalf of local authorities and the Welsh Government published the data. In spite of the improvements to the form and content of the survey, it was disappointing to note the response rate to the survey in 2017 was 24% for county candidates and 17% for community and town candidates. The survey is not mandatory and the Welsh Government is not minded to make it compulsory.
- 3.7 The 2017 Survey showed the following characteristics of councillors and candidates
- **Gender** - 67 per cent of county councillors were male, a similar proportion of unelected county candidates were also male (72 per cent). Among community councillors and unelected community candidates 65 per cent were male.
 - **Age** - Nearly half (47 per cent) of county councillors were aged 60 or above compared to 39 per cent of unelected county candidates. There were similar proportions of community councillors and unelected community candidates who were aged 60 or above, 55 per cent and 47 per cent respectively.
 - **Ethnicity** - Among county councillors 1.8 per cent were non-white compared to 2.3 per cent of unelected county candidates. Among community councillors 1.2 per cent were non-white compared to 1.9 per cent of unelected community candidates.
 - **Religion** - 66 per cent of county councillors stated they were Christian compared to 56 per cent of unelected county candidates. Around two thirds of community councillors also stated they were Christian. This compared to 61 per cent of unelected community councillors.
 - **Sexual orientation** - among county councillors 7.1 per cent stated they were lesbian, gay or bisexual compared to 6.9 per cent of unelected county candidates. The proportion of community councillors and unelected community candidates who reported being lesbian, gay or bisexual were 3.7 per cent and 3.3 per cent respectively.
 - **Health and disability** - the proportion of county councillors who considered themselves to have a disability was 12 per cent, compared to 16 per cent of unelected county candidates. Among community councillors 15 per cent considered themselves to have a disability compared to 18 per cent of unelected community candidates. Physical health was reported to be good or very good for 89 per cent of county councillors and 85 per cent of community councillors.
 - **Education** - two thirds (66 per cent) of county councillors and community councillors had a qualification equivalent to NVQ Level 4 or above. The proportion of unelected county candidates with a similar level of education was 73 per cent compared to 63 per cent of unelected community candidates.
- Employment** - 31 per cent of county councillors were retired compared to 24 per cent of unelected county candidates. Among community councillors 42

per cent were retired compared to 32 per cent of unelected community candidates

The full report can be found here:

<https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/local-government-candidates-survey/?lang=en>²

Diversity in Democracy Programme

3.6 In response to the Expert Group report, the Welsh Government launched the Diversity in Democracy Programme. The programme aimed to increase the diversity of candidates standing for election to local authorities in the election of May 2017.

3.7 The Diversity in Democracy programme ran from October 2014 to March 2017 and offered a mentoring scheme for people from under-represented groups, and paired them up with existing councillors to prepare them to stand as candidates in the local government elections of May 2017.

A total of 65 councillors registered as mentors during the life of the project, and 51 people from under-represented groups signed up as mentees. 16 of the 51 mentees stood as candidates in the election in May 2017 and 4 were successfully elected.

- The demographic breakdown of mentees who participated in the programme was:
 - Female = 37
 - Young people = 20
 - BME = 10
 - Disabled = 7
 - LGBT = 5
 - Traveller/Gypsy = 1

- The demographic breakdown of mentees who expressed an intention to stand for election following their participation in the programme was:
 - Female = 16
 - Young people = 8
 - BME = 7
 - Disabled = 3
 - LGBT = 1

² It is important to note that the survey response rate was low, varied by local authority and the figures cannot be said to be fully representative of the profile of local government. The second caveat is that the survey data has not been weighted accordingly because we do not know the current profile of the population we are looking to measure. This means that confidence intervals have not been calculated for the relevant populations we are looking to measure and they will be unknown margins of error in the population data. However, the findings are broadly consistent with the current evidence base.

The programme closed in March 2017 and an evaluation of the programme has been commissioned by Welsh Government and is due to report its findings shortly

4. To explore the potential impact of the proposals in the Welsh Government's Green Paper, Strengthening Local Government to increasing diversity in Council chambers.

- 4.1 In July 2018, the Welsh Government announced that it would not be pursuing a programme of compulsory mergers at this time but would work with local government through the Working Group on Local Government to develop a shared agenda for reform, including voluntary mergers.
- 4.2 The Green Paper set out a vision for local government for strong and empowered councils which provide bold, determined and focused leadership for their areas. It recognised the importance and value of local democracy and the critical role of councillors. It suggested that the Welsh Government would work with local government to champion the role of the elected member and help communities understand and value the important part councils play in their lives. We are currently scoping this work as part of our plans to raise awareness and promote the value of voting in advance of the local elections in 2022. This will be an extension of our work with 14, 15, 16 and 17 year olds in the run up to the extension of the franchise.
- 4.3 The Green Paper did not cover issues from previous consultations which will form part of the Local Government and Elections Bill to be introduced in the new year. These proposals include matters which are intended to support diversity in local government such as job sharing for executive members, the appointment of assistants to members of the executive and duties on group leaders to promote appropriate standards of conduct amongst their members.
- 4.4 We will be currently evaluating the Diversity in Democracy programme and once we have the report of the formal evaluation, we will consider, together with other relevant research, how to develop a further programme aimed at the 2022 elections.