

**Cross Party Group on Women
25th September 2018
12:30 – 13:30
Conference Room A, Ty Hywel**

**Chairs: Jane Hutt AM & Siân Gwenllian AM
Secretariat: WEN Wales**

Attendees:

Jane Hutt AM (Co-chair)
Siân Gwenllian AM (Co-chair)
Suzy Davies AM
Helen Mary Jones AM
Caroline Jones AM
Julie Morgan AM
Catherine Fookes – WEN Wales (Secretariat)
Hilary Watson – WEN Wales
Maria Mesa – Women Connect First
Rayner Rees – Soroptimists International
Rachel Cable – Oxfam Cymru
Claire Swann – Oxfam Cymru
Mutale Merrill – Bawso
Dr Rachel Minto – Wales Governance Centre
Sarah Thomas – NFWI Wales
Frances Beecher – Llamau
Isabelle Michelson – NAWO
Fay Jones – Individual
Polly Winn – Chwarae Teg

Apologies:

Mohammad Asghar AM
Llyr Gruffydd AM
Victoria Winckler – Bevan Foundation
Valerie Billingham – Age Cymru
Laura McAllister – Wales Governance Centre
Sarah Rees – Women's Equality Party / Flex Appeal
Debbie Shaffer – FTWW

Agenda:

- 1) Welcome, Chairs**
- 2) Jess Blair, Director of ERS Cymru, New Voices Report followed by Q&A**
- 3) CEDAW & Manifesto update (including actions from previous minutes) Catherine Fookes, WEN Wales**
- 4) AOB**

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Minutes:

1. Welcome & Introductions – Siân Gwenllian AM (Co-chair)

Co-chairs Siân Gwenllian AM and Jane Hutt AM welcome attendees to the group and introduced guest Jess Blair, from the Electoral Reform Society Cymru.

2. Jess Blair, Director of the Electoral Reform Society Cymru, discusses 'New Voices: How Welsh politics can begin to reflect Wales' Report followed by Q&A

Jess Blair introduced the new report 'New Voices' which is an updated look at why Welsh politics does not reflect the population, with data collected through surveys and interviews. The report is divided into **a) Institutional barriers** & **b) Societal barriers**.

Institutional barriers: The National Assembly for Wales has traditionally been good for women's representation but terrible for Black and ethnic minority representation (with no BME woman ever elected and few men). The high proportion of women elected has been due to positive action from popular parties. More diverse candidates are recommended in the report.

In comparison to the National Assembly, the UK Parliament has used positive action less effectively (as it has not been taken seriously by some parties). There is much work to do. There is also a lack of data on candidate diversity and elected politicians – which would provide a much greater understanding of the problem and how to tackle it. The Equalities Act 2010, already on statute books, would allow this data to be collected, but it has never been enacted.

Seat blockers are another big issue. The current electoral system guarantees safe seats. Change can only come through changing the electoral system.

Local government is the weakest when it comes to diversity. Chwarae Teg research from 2017 found that a third of all wards had no women candidates standing. 2 of the 22 local government cabinets have all white male cabinets, the Vale of Glamorgan and Blaenau Gwent. This is why quotas are necessary. It is worth noting that Wales has a high percentage of independent councillors, for whom quota systems do not exist.

ERS Cymru calls for better equalities monitoring and asks whether Welsh Government can do more to increase diversity in local government. There should be a review of remunerations. For example, if the roles of councillors were full time with a full-time salary, would they be more diverse?

Societal Barriers: The research recorded huge amounts of harassment and abuse experienced by both candidates, politicians and their support staff. One person interviewed said 'Why would I want to be a politician?!'. There are huge issues around social media and online abuse. Some ways to combat this are a joint code of conduct on intimidatory behaviours, political education and political engagement in particular for young people. Changes need to allow elected politicians to have family lives too as they currently work six or seven days a week. With travel time and caring responsibilities, there need to be changes to the hours of work to allow politicians to maintain a semblance of normal life. The ERS Cymru recommendations in the report possibly did not go far enough with regards to these issues. The huge cost of standing for election is an insurmountable barrier for many possible candidates.

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Jess Blair recommended looking at Isabel Hardman's new book 'Why We Get the Wrong Politicians' which is a really interesting account of what it means to be a politician in Westminster and examines both the strengths and the weaknesses of the institution.

Jess Blair welcomes suggestions and ideas for further recommendations once people have read the report.

Group discussion:

Siân Gwenllïan AM sits on the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, which is currently working on increasing diversity in local government.

The issue of working hours was raised and discussions around when local governments meet – this is also discussed in the New Voices report. In 1999, there was the intention that business at the National Assembly finished at 17:30. As it stands, it is not possible to consider standing as an Assembly Member if you are currently a parent of small children.

Jess Blair was asked whether recommendation 12 from the New Voices report with regards to a joint code of conduct could be work that is brought together by this Cross Party Group. Recommendation 12 is as follows: *The Welsh political parties should develop a joint code of conduct on intimidatory behaviour. Better training and guidance to candidates on social media abuse should also be offered, as was also recommended by the CSPL last year.*

It was also raised that official childcare all finishes at 6pm, which is an issue for Assembly Members, who are frequently still working at this time. While there is now a crèche in Westminster, there is not a crèche at the National Assembly. This group believes that more should be done in relation to women standing for political office. There are different questions for different Assembly Members. For example, the split of the week is also concerning, particularly for the AMs who have the longest travel times between their constituencies and Cardiff Bay. Responsibilities around caring for older people, as well as caring for children, is being fed into these discussions.

Catherine Fookes gave an update on job-sharing for AMs, as raised at the last meeting where it was agreed that the group would write to the Assembly Commission about job-sharing for Assembly Members. The secretariat had not received a response, though Frances Beecher, who used the secretariat's template letter to write to the Assembly Commission had received a response. [Since this meeting, WEN Wales has received a response and the letter is available below in the 'actions' section].

Childcare was raised as the biggest barrier in women's lives as it affects access to everything. One member gave the example that English as a second language teaching was impacted by funders stopping the provision of childcare for participants because they were deemed as 'not needing childcare'.

There was a feeling that ERS Cymru's recommendations made sense, but it was asked how we could drive this forward. There was consensus that this group has a key role to play.

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It would be useful to group recommendations by targeting recommendations to different areas, such as Welsh Government, political parties etc.

In relation to working hours, the New Voices report focused on local government (and Assembly). Welsh Government have statutory guidance on consulting councillors regarding working hours that work best for that cohort.

Catherine Fookes, WEN Wales, stated that there are many documents around currently with key recommendations, such as the WEN Wales Manifesto. Change comes as part of a movement. Group could look for funding to run a campaign such as a 50:50 Assembly, with a big vision, as it won't happen without outside pressure. She referred to the movement in the USA www.Representwomen.org and www.5050parliament.co.uk in the UK.

The group discussed how job sharing cannot be separated from childcare and that it needs to be available at all levels. It needs to be looked at long term, including changing the legislation that prevents it at cabinet level. While this was off the table for the first round of legislation, it might be possible for the second bill.

There are still barriers to women, including psychological barriers. There are schemes, such as WEN Wales' mentoring scheme, Ask Her to Stand at UK Parliament level. Confidence is a big barrier as women frequently won't apply if they don't think they already have the skills. There is never a perfect time.

Mike Payne from GMB was approaching women particularly, and BME women to ask them to stand and create potential candidates.

Group discussed how women won't put themselves forward for seats that they're not going to win. Confidence is not a substitute for structural change.

Group decided to put a skeleton of a campaign together for a 50:50 campaign with a small subgroup:

- Catherine Fookes – WEN Wales
- Frances Beecher – Llamau
- Maria Mesa – Women Connect First
- Mutale Merrill – Bawso
- Jess Blair – ERS Cymru
- Rachel Cable – Oxfam Cymru

With a discussion paper for the next meeting.

3. Manifesto & CEDAW Update (Catherine Fookes)

WEN Wales presented our shadow CEDAW report in Geneva in July. Following the previous CPG on Women, Jane Hutt AM asked Carwyn Jones AM whether he would meet the Welsh delegation, which led to a meeting.

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Next steps: in the run up to the official examination in February, WEN Wales will be collecting more case studies to try to make CEDAW more accessible.

Manifestos – WEN Wales is currently collecting endorsements from external organisations and is still calling for more. It would be good to link New Voices to the Manifesto (N.B. that the Manifesto is mentioned in New Voices).

It was noted that politicians take notice when 1000s of people raise issues as a collective voice, rather than just a small group. Therefore the membership groups such as NFWI Wales, Soroptimists, Merched Y Wawr are key to the campaign.

4. Any other business

Chwarae Teg launch of research into women's career aspirations (9th October)

Oxfam Cymru launching new research into Fair Work.

Next meeting: Joint Cross Party Group on Women & Violence against Women and Children. 27th November – Media Room.

Actions:

- 1) Circulate a link to full report 'New Voices': [Welsh / English](#) (secretariat)
- 2) Circulate Electoral Reform Society Cymru report 'New Voices' recommendations, as handed out at the meeting: [see appendix](#) (secretariat)
- 3) WEN Wales to circulate the response from Elin Jones AM, chair of the Assembly Commission, regarding Job-sharing for Assembly Members (secretariat)



Letter from Elin Jones AM re CPG AM



Letter to Elin Jones AM Job Share final.r

- 4) Campaign sub-group to create a discussion paper for the next meeting.

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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Appendix



New Voices: How Welsh politics can begin to reflect Wales

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 Welsh Government should introduce a 45% quota for women for each party at local government elections, meaning that at least 45% of their candidates should be female.

Recommendation 2 Measures should be put in place to encourage a broader range of candidates from ethnic minorities, age spread and those with disabilities alongside ways to monitor the development of this. As part of this each party should ask candidates to fill out an equalities monitoring form upon selection and every party should make the headline figures of their candidates public in a standardised format to allow the progress of parties to be compared fairly. Each local authority should then publish a complete report of their makeup after each election.

Recommendation 3 Council leaders should be held to account by Welsh Government if they fail to select councillors who are diverse for their leadership teams.

Recommendation 4 Welsh Government should commission a review into councillor remuneration, which should include an analysis of the potential for fewer councillors at a higher salary.

Recommendation 5 The UK Government should enact Section 106 of the Equality Act in time for the next General Election requiring all parties to publish equality data in a coherent and standardised format. At a Welsh level parties shouldn't wait for the next UK General Election and should collate this information for the next Assembly and local elections.

Recommendation 6 The UK Government should legislate ensuring all parties have to field candidates made up of at least 45% women. Work should also be undertaken to review how to put in place measures to promote other diverse groups.

Recommendation 7 Each political party should introduce an action plan on diversity to select candidates for vacant target seats at a Westminster level.

Recommendation 8 A proportional electoral system should be adopted for UK General Elections, to ameliorate problem of 'seat blockers' under Westminster's system.

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Recommendation 9 The National Assembly for Wales should implement all of the Expert Panel on Assembly Reform’s recommendations on gender parity by the next Assembly election.

Recommendation 10 Each party should look to field candidates from a more diverse background in the next Assembly elections, particularly female BAME candidates and those with disabilities.

Recommendation 11 The recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life that social media companies should develop automated techniques for identifying intimidatory behaviour and taking it down should be implemented. Social media companies should also offer tools for users to escalate reports of illegal online activity to the police.

Recommendation 12 The Welsh political parties should develop a joint code of conduct on intimidatory behaviour. Better training and guidance to candidates on social media abuse should also be offered, as was also recommended by the CSPL last year.

Recommendation 13 Better political education should be delivered in Welsh schools to begin to try and tackle the negative culture that is currently leading to a lot of the abuse we are seeing.

Recommendation 14 An assessment of the viability of a crèche at the National Assembly for Wales for use by Assembly Members and staff should be undertaken.

Recommendation 15 Job sharing should become an option for politicians in every institution provided the proper arrangements are made.

Recommendation 16 A review should be undertaken into how funding can be made available for candidates from a diverse background, which should consider the ‘Unpacking Diversity’ report’s recommendation of an ‘Access to Politics Fund’.

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