

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Date of Meeting	Thursday 24 February 2022
Report Subject	Diversity in Democracy Action Plan
Report Author	Chief Officer (Governance)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2018 the WLGA has been looking at whether the demography of elected representatives reflects the demography of the areas which they represent. In 2021 it resolved to urge all Councils in Wales to commit to their own diversity in democracy declaration in order to try and make the elected Councillor cohort more reflective of the population as a whole. In July 2021 Full Council approved its own diversity in democracy declaration and agreed to develop an action plan.

The draft action plan is intended to reduce or remove barriers to election amongst underrepresented groups. It contains a series of work streams to:

- Raise awareness of the role and process for election;
- Train and support Councillors once elected;
- Reduce barriers to fulfilling the role once elected;
- Provide inspiration or role models to underrepresented groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Diversity in Democracy action plan is approved.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	BACKGROUND
1.01	<p>The lack of diverse representation in local authorities has been recognised for a long time. A more diverse democracy and elected representatives who are more reflective of their communities can lead to better engagement with communities and ward members. This leads to greater levels of confidence and trust and better decision making informed by a wider range of perspectives.</p> <p>In September 2018 the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) agreed to take steps to advance gender equality and diversity in Councils</p>

	<p>before the 2022 elections in recognition of the lack of diversity in Welsh Councils. A Cross Party Working Group was set up to explore broader underrepresentation in democracy.</p> <p>In March 2021 the WLGA Council received a report from the working group with proposals designed to achieve a step change in diversity following the 2022 elections.</p> <p>The report identified barriers to participation, broadly :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time commitment and meeting times - Political and organisational culture - Childcare and other caring responsibilities - Public criticism and online abuse - Remuneration and impact on employment - Lack of diverse role models and incumbency <p>The WLGA Council unanimously agreed that action was required. A letter was sent to each Local Authority in Wales (which was considered by Flintshire County Council on the 22nd July 2021).</p>
1.02	<p>At their meeting on the 22nd of July 2021, Flintshire County Council recognised the importance of diversity in democracy by making a commitment to be a ‘Diverse Council’ and undertook to develop an action plan to improve diversity. The Constitution and Democratic Services Committee (C&DSC) were tasked with developing the action plan. Two Member workshops were held on the 11th and 19th of January to provide all members with an opportunity to consider the draft plan prior to consideration by the C&DSC. The workshops were supportive of the proposed action plan and suggested/prompted further actions to promote diversity, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. profiling a cross section of female Councillors for International Women’s Day on 8th March; 2. engaging with local employers to encourage them to support Councillors with appropriate time off for their duties (which is actually a statutory right); 3. looking again at the “welcome pack” for Members which, whilst very detailed, may not be easily digestible; <p>It is also clear that political parties have been undertaking their own work to increase the diversity of candidates.</p>
1.03	<p>The 11 key areas for consideration are summarised below. Details of the proposed actions in relation to each area are detailed within the attached draft action plan (appendix 1).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess the effectiveness of the provisions in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 in relation to data collection, and in relation to other candidate data that could be collected within the current devolution framework in order for political parties to support diverse candidates at elections. 2. Identify ways to provide broader support to Councillors and potential Councillors to inform their decision to stand for elected office.

	<p>3. Improve the safety of Councillors and their families when undertaking their Council duties.</p> <p>4. Increase confidence of Councillors that they are valued, expectations placed on them are fair and that their remuneration levels appropriately reflect the work undertaken.</p> <p>5. Maximise opportunities for individuals to work in ways that enable them to achieve a work / life balance which protects their welfare and wellbeing and allows them to manage any caring / dependency relationships.</p> <p>6. Greater respect and support for those standing for and securing elected office in Wales.</p> <p>7. Increase understanding of different tiers of government in Wales, the role each plays in society and how they operate.</p> <p>8. Comprehensive training and awareness programme available through a variety of routes available for Councillors to support them in their role as Councillors.</p> <p>9. Increase engagement with the public to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raise awareness of the role and activities of the Council; • provide clarity about how the public can better inform local decision making; • build greater community cohesion through a greater presence at community events, creating and building upon community networks. <p>10. Increase awareness of the role of Councillors, the contribution they make to society and how to become a Councillor.</p> <p>11. Increase opportunities for women to play a full role in supporting and representing their communities.</p>
1.04	<p>The action plan includes the suggestions from the workshops. These actions will be under taken between now and the elections in May and during the next term of the Council. A number of actions are complete/underway such as planning for International Women’s Day, and the website now contains a section on becoming a councillor (link here).</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	The proposed action plan can be supported within existing resources.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	The action plan has been shared with all Councillors and two workshops have been held to debate the contents. The action plan itself proposes a number of surveys for Councillors to establish what barriers exist and what more could be done to promote greater diversity.

3.02	The report went to Constitution and Democratic Services Committee on 26 th January.
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4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
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4.01	None.
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5.00	APPENDICES
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5.01	Appendix 1 – Draft Diversity in Democracy action plan
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6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
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6.01	None. Contact Officer: Gareth Owens, Chief Officer (Governance) Telephone: 01352 702344 E-mail: gareth.legal@flintshire.gov.uk
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7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
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7.01	None.
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