



Ein cyf/Our ref MA-RE-2788-23

John Griffiths MS
Chair
Local Government and Housing Committee
Senedd Cymru
SeneddHousing@senedd.wales

27 November 2023

Dear John,

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Local Government and Housing Committee entitled Diversity in Local Government – October 2023

Thank you to the Committee for their valuable work in this important area of Diversity in Local Government. The Committee's consideration of the oral and written evidence presented before them has produced a helpful report and recommendations which build upon the Committee's recommendations in its report on the same subject in 2019.

The Welsh Government is committed to increasing diversity within elected office and enabling individuals who wish to stand for election within their communities to do so.

Your report focusses on a number of important issues, including working together to raise awareness and promote job-sharing for executive roles, encourage individuals to provide valuable insights and views through the candidates' survey and support and promote opportunities for disabled individuals and other under-represented groups to participate fully in local democracy. These are areas where work is already underway, but there are always further steps which can be taken to improve opportunities for individuals.

The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill currently progressing through the Senedd builds on this approach and will pave the way for schemes to be introduced which support people to participate in local democracy through standing for election and representing their communities.

We have commissioned and published a range of research which is informing the next phase of our Diversity in Democracy programme.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

We will also want to be clear about what steps can be taken to assist individuals across the broader spectrum of protected characteristics. We also want to explore alternative arrangements to provide more tailored support arrangements for different groups dependent on the barriers they face. This will help us inform and develop future schemes of support.

We want to work with stakeholders and all partners to ensure a collaborative approach which achieves further progress in this area.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Evans". The script is cursive and fluid, with a large initial 'R' and 'E'.

Rebecca Evans AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Cyllid a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Finance and Local Government

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Local Government and Housing Committee entitled Diversity in Local Government:

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should work closely with the WLGA to improve the response rate to the Local Government Candidate Survey. This includes increasing awareness and promotion of the survey among candidates and councillors and sharing best practice between local authorities.

Response: Accept

We share the concerns raised by the Committee. The decrease in the number of individuals completing the survey is disappointing.

We will work partners with a range of partners to explore what further steps we can take to promote the importance of the survey and encourage a greater level of completion.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should work with all partners, including local authorities, to identify areas of good practice to improve diversity in local government and to share and learn from those experiences.

Response: Accept

We will work with partners to identify opportunities to share best practice across Wales. This will include consideration, with partners, about the benefits of holding an event in Autumn 2024 to showcase best practice and develop new approaches to encourage greater diversity in local democracy.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

Recommendations 3 and 4

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should work with the WLGA to assess the efficacy of all initiatives to increase diversity in local government, including the implementation and impact of Diversity Declarations.

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should keep under review and evaluate the impact of duties placed upon local authorities under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to promote democratic participation. This includes measuring the impact of local authority public participation strategies and sharing of good practice.

Response: Accept in Principle

We will work with partners to ensure key initiatives aimed at encouraging greater diversity area are kept under review to establish whether they are delivering on their aims.

We have issued comprehensive guidance to support local government diversity and inclusion initiatives, such as the Public Participation Strategies which must set out how the council will ensure the widest possible range of views from the public inform council

business. In Autumn 2024 we will assess how the strategies across Wales align with the published guidance. The outcome of this review will inform further work in this area.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should work with all relevant partners to identify opportunities to further promote the Access to Elected Office Fund and the benefits of the fund.

Response: Accept

The Elections and Elected Members (Wales) Bill includes a requirement for Welsh Ministers to establish a financial support scheme for disabled people standing for elected office.

We will continue to work with Disability Wales and others to identify other ways we can support disabled people to fully participate in local democracy.

Financial Implications – The costs associated with the establishment of the fund on a legislative footing are set out in the supporting information to the Elections and Elected Members (Wales) Bill. Funding for individual schemes will be considered as part of the normal budget process.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should ensure that lessons learnt from the evaluation of the Access to Elected Office Fund are taken forward, ensuring there is sufficient and timely support for disabled candidates before future local government elections

Response: Accept

The outcome of the evaluation of the pilot fund will inform future fund arrangements.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should consider how initiatives such as the Access to Elected Office Fund could be expanded or developed in time for the next local government elections in order to support candidates from other under-represented groups. This work should be developed regardless of whether or not the provisions in the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill become law.

Response: Accept

The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill includes provision for arrangements to be put in place to remove the barriers to participation in elections for people from other protected characteristic groups and those impacted by socio-economic circumstances.

We will work with stakeholders to identify those barriers and what support can be put in place to make a positive difference. In the absence of the Bill becoming law, we will continue to work with others to deliver non legislative measures to improve participation.

Financial Implications – There would be a cost expanding the Fund, however these costs will be met from existing programme budgets.

Recommendations 8 and 9

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government, along with local government partners, should work together to raise awareness and promote job-sharing for executive roles.

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should facilitate greater sharing of local authorities' experiences of job-sharing in executive roles to understand the benefits and challenges associated with the provision. It should also ensure better collection of data on job-sharing to enable regular monitoring of the impact of job-sharing in contributing to improving diversity across authorities.

Response: Accept

We will continue to work with partners to promote the benefits and opportunities of job-share and explore with local government how information about job-share arrangements can better be shared amongst local authorities and how they can share best practice.

We have committed to consulting on extending job share provisions in respect of elected members in local government. This remains our aim.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should work closely with the town and community council sector to ensure sufficient support, training and resources are available to enable the use of multi-location meeting technology in all community councils in Wales

Response: Accept in Principle

Work has already begun to provide digital support, training and resources to the town and community council sector. This follows on from the Local Government Chief Digital Officer's (LGCEO) publication of a report into the digital readiness of community councils earlier this year.

Financial Implications – None. The Welsh Government has already made available up to £150,000 in 2023-24 to fund the delivery of a sector-led action plan to provide digital support to community and town councils, which includes the provision of hybrid meetings.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should, in light of the closure of Chwarae Teg, assess the capacity across Wales to deliver mentoring schemes and quickly identify how any gaps in provision can be filled.

Response: Accept

Mentoring schemes are a good way to introduce individuals to politics, provide a better understanding of the demands and opportunities of operating within local democracy.

Discussions have already taken place to assess the impact of the Chwarae Teg cessation of operations. Arrangements are in place with employers to continue the placements for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 cohorts, and the organisations have recruited for 23/24.

In addition, through the Equality and Inclusion Grant, Welsh Government provides funding to the Equal Power Equal Voice mentoring programme, led by WEN Wales in partnership with Disability Wales, EYSTN and Stonewall Cymru. Much of the funding for these arrangements is provided through Big Lottery funding.

Financial Implications – None. Future funding decisions about the Equal power Equal voice programme will be taken as part of wider budget decisions.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should provide an update to the Committee on the outcome of its work to bring key partners together to combat abuse in politics.

Response: Accept

This event is scheduled to take place in January 2024. In addition to updating the Committee about the outcome of the event the Committee will be invited to nominate a representative to participate.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should continue to press the UK Government to take strong and robust action to tackle social media abuse.

Response: Accept

Candidates and serving local members and Members of the Senedd should be able to come forward and take part in the democratic process without fear of abuse.

We will continue to raise this matter with the UK Parliament alongside identifying steps we can take in Wales to combat the damaging increase of these inappropriate behaviours.

Financial Implications – None.