**WRITTEN STATEMENT**

**BY**

**THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

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| **TITLE** | **Phase Two - Diversity in Democracy Programme Action Plan** |
| **DATE** | **Friday 25 September** |
| **BY** | **Julie James, Minister for Housing and Local Government** |

This Welsh Government is committed to increasing diversity across all aspects of public life. This includes tackling the barriers which prevent individuals’ active participation in local democracy.

I have been clear the evaluation of phase one of our Diversity in Democracy work would form the foundation of our plans for phase two of the programme; building on its successes and developing new opportunities to assist individuals in supporting their communities. I was also clear the evaluation should not be seen in isolation. There are many reports published which identify barriers to participation and signpost opportunities to overcome, or at the very least mitigate those barriers.

In autumn 2019 I established a Ministerial advisory group made up of key stakeholders to work in partnership and consider the evidence available from the [Evaluation of phase one of the Diversity in Democracy programme.](https://gov.wales/evaluation-diversity-democracy-0) Alongside this they considered two other reports - the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee’s report on [Diversity in Local Government](http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld12488/cr-ld12488-e.pdf) and the Remuneration Board’s report [Unpacking diversity: Barriers and incentives to standing for election to the National Assembly for Wales](http://orca.cf.ac.uk/113128/1/REPORT-Unpacking-Diversity-July-2018.pdf).

In addition, a number of workshop events were held across Wales which explored a range of subjects relating to becoming a councillor including communication and awareness, training and development, remuneration, safe and flexible work and targeted support. The evaluation of the reports coupled with the feedback from the workshops provided the basis for phase two of our Diversity in Democracy programme.

Although delayed by the need to prioritise action to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, I am pleased to confirm the work we will be taking forward as part of the next phase of this programme.

It is important to recognise that this is not the beginning of our journey, it is a continuation. We have already delivered on our commitment to support greater diversity. In particular we were:

* The first country in the UK to introduce family absence for councillors in principal authorities to enable individuals to balance the important roles they play in society with their responsibilities as parents.
* Also the first country to introduce a survey for candidates and elected members at local government elections to gather important data about the diversity of candidates and councillors, this survey has been conducted twice and we continue to look for ways to improve it.

None of these steps could have been taken without the cooperation and collaboration of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), One Voice Wales, councils and councillors and the third sector and I would like to take this opportunity to put on record my thanks for their continued contribution and support.

It is within this spirit the next phase of this journey begins.

We have been working hard to introduce arrangements for the establishment of a fund to support disabled candidates who wish to put themselves forward for elected office and that the expenses they incur, as a result of their access or communication requirements, do not count towards the formal expenses limit. This has required us to make changes to legislation and we expect these changes to be completed by the end of the year, paving the way for a fund.

I am pleased to announce today that we will be consulting shortly about the detail of these arrangements. The fund we are establishing will be a joint pilot to support disabled candidates seeking election for both the 2022 local government and the 2021 Senedd elections. I have asked Disability Wales to work with us in developing the details of the arrangement and to take forward the support, assessment and allocation processes as part of the pilot arrangements. An evaluation of the arrangements will be undertaken to inform future arrangements. Legislation will be tabled later this year to exclude these expenses from candidates’ expenses for both sets of elections.

Feedback from the workshops across Wales identified a strong message that councillors do not feel valued and respected. They do not believe individuals across Wales understand the role of the councillor and the important contribution they make on behalf of communities. Participants also felt there was an unrealistic expectation placed upon councillors to be available at all hours of the day, seven days of the week. This feedback aligns with conversations I have had with individuals across Wales and as part of the next phase of this work I will be commissioning work which will explore these matters in more detail.

In addition the actions in the accompanying annex include areas we are aiming to address through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill (“the LGE Bill”) currently progressing through the Senedd:

* job sharing in some offices in principal councils (including the offices of executive member and executive leader);
* a duty on principal councils to publish an electronic and postal address for correspondence for each council member;
* a duty on principal councils to produce a Public Participation Strategy and for it to be reviewed regularly;
* a duty on political group leaders to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of their group;
* electronic broadcasting of certain meetings;
* extended provision for remote attendance at local authority meetings;
* Provisions enabling the maximum period of absence for each type of family absence for members of local authorities to be specified within regulations to enable the provision to be kept up to date.

We will also be:

* Increasing the training and development opportunities available for councillors;
* Maximising the use of work life balance by increasing the use of remote attendance;
* Exploring the use of gender quotas and,
* Ensuring councillors and their families are safe when undertaking their duties.

This programme has been developed in conjunction with the wider local government family. The WLGA and One Voice Wales will be working together to revise their protocols on respect and support for councillors across Wales. They are undertaking a review of their existing training programmes in light of feedback from the workshops on additional areas of focus such as lone working. They are also considering maximising opportunities for joint learning and strengthening links between the tiers of local government.

The WLGA are also working with partner organisations across the UK on the Civility in Public Life campaign, whilst One Voice Wales will be updating their “being a local councillor” guide for use at the upcoming elections.

Third sector organisations are developing an all Wales mentoring scheme which is aimed at providing advice, guidance and support to under-represented groups to help then actively participate in public service.

Working together we will take these important steps to improve the opportunities available for individuals to participate in local democracy, raise the profile of councillors across Wales and harness the spirit that exists within communities, as demonstrated by the recent COVID-19 experiences.

The oversight of this programme will be undertaken by a sub group of the Democratic Renewal Steering Group.

Annex

**Diversity in Democracy – Phase 2 - Action Plan**

| **Objective** | **Actions** | **Time Frame** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Increase understanding of different tiers of government in Wales, the role each plays in society andhow they operate | Undertake a comprehensive communications campaign with general and targeted messaging | January 2021 onwards |
| A set of educational resources to accompany the extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds in Wales developed | October 2020 |
| Work with key stakeholders and representative organisations to ensure qualifying foreign citizens are aware of their right to vote in Senedd elections | Ongoing |
| Increase engagement with the public to:   * 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. | Welsh Government to introduce legislation to place a duty on principal councils to produce a Public Participation Strategy and to review it as soon as practicable after each ordinary local government election | February 2021 |
| Work with principal councils to produce guidance to underpin the Bill provision setting out what is required within the Public Participation Strategy | Ongoing throughout 2020/2021 |
| Work with principal councils to publish their constitution and constitution guide to increase public engagement | January 2022 |
| Increase awareness of the role of councillors, the contribution they make to society and how to become a councillor | Production of a series of short films in conjunction with stakeholders highlighting the role of principal and town and community councillors to include:   * the benefits from both a councillor perspective and community perspective; * the type of work undertaken; the remuneration received; and, * the training provided to undertake the role | January 2021 |
| Work with WLGA to raise awareness among public sector organisations of the benefits of employees undertaking civic duties and explore whether there are further steps which could be taken to encourage wider participation | March 2022 |
| Increase confidence of councillors that they are valued, expectations placed on them are fair and that their remuneration levels appropriately reflect the work undertaken. | Review of the role and remuneration of councillors. In particular, the review will look at:   * the understanding of the role of a councillor from both the councillor and the elector perspective, * the views of the community about their elected representatives, * a realistic understanding of the time worked by councillors in Wales in support of communities both at principal and community council levels, * how other countries recognise and reflect the ‘voluntary’ aspect of the role, if at all, * Consider existing rules on remuneration and options for how remuneration should be calculated in the future, * whether there should be payments to councillors who lose their seats at election, and, * how the remuneration interacts with the tax system | June 2021 |
| Greater respect and support for those standing for and securing elected office in Wales. | Work with WLGA and OVW on a series of protocols to ensure respect and support is provided by principal councils and town and community councils towards their elected members | March 2022 |
| Help promote the ‘Working Relationships between Community and Town Councillors and the Local County Councillor’ guidance document | March 2022 |
| Place a duty on political group leaders to promote high standards of conduct | January 2021 |
| Continue to press the UK Government to take action and ensure social media companies deal with online abuse | February 2021 |
| Comprehensive training and awareness programme available through a variety of routes available for councillors to support them in their role as councillors | A completed review of the training and development available for councillors at both principal and community levels identifying:   * additional areas where training / development materials are required * areas of training and development which can be made available online without adversely impacting on the learning outcome of individuals * areas where materials can be maximised across the two tiers of local government – e.g. core areas such as health and safety, lone working, resilience etc * a core set of training materials which can be used for all councillors in Wales including IT training * WLGA and OVW to work collaboratively to share information already available on training courses * opportunities for sharing generic content across different sectors and different platforms | May 2021 |
| Ensure that councillors undertake health and safety training, lone working training and anything else offered to ensure their safety during elections and when they are elected | May 2021 |
| Identify ways to provide broader support to councillors and potential councillors to inform their decision to stand for elected office | Using the lessons learned from previous mentoring schemes, explore the options for developing a mentoring and support programme to encourage under-represented groups to participate in public life | March 2021 |
| Work with WLGA and OVW to develop a pathway for participation recognising the different stages of the lifecycle of a councillor and the awareness / skills requirements at each level – to include mentoring and job shadowing | March 2021 |
| Explore the potential for the introduction of skills training for people who wish to learn more about what being a councillor entails and also the structure which could deliver the training | June 2021 |
| Build and expand existing leadership programme to all council members in Wales | March 2021 |
| Make legislation to exempt disability expenses being counted towards the limit candidates can spend on their election campaign | January 2021 |
| Introduce an Access to Elected Office fund to help with expenses incurred due to a disability when standing for elected office | January 2021 |
| Explore whether there is a case for exempting further classes of expenditure for candidate expense limits | July 2021 |
| Explore whether access to elected office fund should be available to other under-represented groups | July 2021 |
| Explore support which can be offered to independent members | July 2021 |
| Improve the safety of councillors and their families when undertaking their council duties | Remove the requirement for personal addresses to be used on ballot papers | January 2021 |
| Place a duty on principal councils to publish official addresses on council websites and in the register of interests rather than personal addresses for councillors | January 2021 |
| 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 | Make provision for job-sharing by executive leaders and other office holders of principal councils | January 2021 |
| Review the arrangements in place for remote attendance in local authority meetings in light of the experience of virtual meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic | January 2021 |
| Explore the potential for individuals to stand for election as part of a job share partnership - the barriers and opportunities | December 2021 |
| Make family absence amendment regulations to extend the absence period available to councillors for adopters leave | March 2021 |
| Review the family absence arrangements for councillors to establish whether there are further steps which could be taken | March 2021 |
| Ensure Local Authorities and Leaders are aware of their duty to have regard to guidance under section 38 of the 2000 Act | March 2021 |
| Increase opportunities for women to play a full role in supporting and representing their communities | Consult on the use of gender quotas for local government elections in Wales | May 2021 |
| Write to the UK Government about extending the sunset clause in section 104(7) of the Equality Act 2010 and commencing section 106 of the same Act | Completed |
| 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 | Officials to look at the lessons learned from previous surveys and review and amend upcoming surveys to provide the best evidence | January 2022 |