

MEETING	Democratic Services Committee
DATE	9 September, 2014
SUBJECT	Diversity
PURPOSE	To report on recent findings and proposals on improving diversity in Local Government
AUTHOR	Geraint George Head of Democratic Services

1. Background

- 1.1 The Councillor Commission Expert Panel Wales was established by the Welsh Government in March 2008 to examine the recommendations of the “Councillors Commission” - in turn established by the UK Government to review participation in local government in England - and to consider more broadly the barriers to participation in local government in Wales and make recommendations to Welsh Ministers.
- 1.2 This was a relatively large body (13 members) including councillors, business representatives, political party officials, trade union and equalities representatives. Chaired by Sophie Howe, it published its report “Are we being served?” in November 2008.
- 1.3 The report contained 35 recommendations, including ones dealing with equality monitoring of councillors, publicity campaigning, training and development for councillors, political education in schools, family absence for elected members and remuneration.
- 1.4 Not all were aimed at the Welsh Government; some were aimed at local government and were the subject of updates from the WLGA.
- 1.5 Many of the recommendations of the “Expert Panel” led to the policy issues addressed through the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (“the Measure”).
- 1.6 This Measure was introduced to the National Assembly in order to put into primary legislation policies which had developed from a variety of sources. Prior to 2009, these had been difficult to address because of the lack of legislative powers vested in the Assembly.
- 1.7 Parts 1 and 2, in particular, had their roots in the report of the Expert Panel. Most of these provisions were unique to Wales:
- 1.8 The Measure required that the 22 Principal Councils should:
 1. Survey of candidates
 2. Remote Attendance
 3. Annual Reports

4. Timing of Council Meetings
5. Training and Development
6. Democratic Services
7. Family Absence

2. Current Position

- 2.1 In May 2013, Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business, announced she would be establishing an expert group to consider the results of the survey in detail, take evidence from interested groups, and set out a plan of action for the Welsh Government and political parties to ensure that between now and 2017 we collectively do our best to encourage greater diversity in local government.
- 2.2 According to Professor Laura, McAllister Chair of the Expert Group, the work of the Expert Group on Diversity in Local Government has run in parallel with that of the Commission on Public Service and Delivery, chaired by Sir Paul Williams (“the Williams Commission”), it appears likely that its recommendations will lead to a reduction in the number of councillors and councils in Wales. If that comes to pass, it will be crucial that the proposals in this report are put into effect to ensure that improving diversity is a major factor influencing the selection of candidates to new councils.
- 2.3 The Report of the Expert Group on Diversity in Local Government - On Balance: Diversifying Democracy in Local Government in Wales is attached at appendix 1. The document considered topics such as establishing youth mayors and cabinet, political parties’ initiatives, addressing the barriers to participation and good practice in addressing diversity.

3. Annual Report by Head of Democratic Services on Behalf of the Democratic Services Committee 2013/14

- 3.1 In the Annual Report by the Head of Democratic Services to Full Council Councillor Les Day offered some suggestions such as Female Gwynedd Councillors to form a Female Forum to explore the possibilities to introduce support groups, network and offer mentoring for female councillors, to encourage more women to stand as potential councillors.
- 3.2 Councillor Day also suggested that work is needed to start engaging with school children to capture their imagination, visiting schools, possibly a councillors’ road show, speaking to primary school classes about school debates and encouraging school visits to council chambers.

- 3.3 Speaking to secondary schools, particularly Years 12 and 13, using the established school councils – and possibly to co-opt non-voting youth members onto the Democratic Services Committee, involving them in how to encourage young people. Actively promoting the work and role of councillors.
- 3.4 Councillor Day also suggested the need to reach out to speak to Access groups together with Disabled Champion Cllr Peter Read. Publicise the allowances that are available for Carers.

4. Recommendation

Establish a Democracy Sub-Group of the Democratic Services Committee under the leadership of the Chair, with the membership to include the relevant member champions to consider and develop a draft work programme to be submitted back to the committee.