

Committee: **Council**  
Date of Meeting: **29<sup>th</sup> July, 2021**  
Report Subject: **Diverse Council Declaration**  
Portfolio Holder: **Councillor N. Daniels - Leader / Executive Member Corporate Services**  
Report Submitted by: **Gemma Wasley, Service Manager Performance and Democratic**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance & Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	08/07/21						29/07/21	

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 To present to Council the 'Diverse Council Declaration' for approval. The declaration is set out in appendix 1.
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 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.
  - 2.2 As part of this, Councils are encouraged to sign up to becoming a diverse Council to:
    - Provide a clear, public commitment to improving diversity;
    - Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all;
    - Consider staggering council meeting times and agreeing recess periods to support councillors with other commitments; and
    - Set out an action plan of activity ahead of the 2022 local elections.
  - 2.3 The Council's Diverse Declaration is set out in appendix 1.
  - 2.4 There are a number of expectations on Councils to support diversity in the democratic process and also with political parties to support the process of becoming a councillor and supporting councillors once they become elected. Some of this activity includes:
    - to encourage all political parties, through the WLGA Political Groups, to commit to proactive and coordinated activities to improve diversity in local government democracy;
    - a formal position calling for the introduction of resettlement grants for all councillors and senior salary holders;
    - to encourage all councillors to claim any necessary allowances or expenses;
    - that councils should set targets to be representative of the communities they serve at the next elections;
    - to support the use of voluntary quotas for Welsh local elections; and

- the WLGA reviews the impact of voluntary quotas following the next local elections.

2.5 In addition, as part of the Local Government and Elections Act there are expectations, including:

- 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.

2.6 As part of the above, the Council will be looking to develop an action plan to address the requirements.

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

*To include Recommendation(s) / Endorsement by other groups, e.g. CMT/Committees/Other groups)*

3.1 The report has been considered by CLT at their meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> July and approved option 1.

#### 3.2.1 **Option 1**

For Council to:

- Sign up to the Diverse Council Declaration as set out in appendix 1;
- Agree for an action plan to be developed to address the required areas of being a diverse Council; and
- For the action plan to be presented to Democratic Services Committee for consideration and sign off before being approved at Council on 30<sup>th</sup> September.

#### 3.2.2 **Option 2**

For Council to:

- Make amendment to the Diverse Council Declaration, as set out in appendix 1, before approval.

### 4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 The Council has a responsibility to support more diverse Councils and to work with partners and the community to encourage people from under-represented groups to stand for election.

4.2 Political parties across Wales are also encouraged to support this process. Being a diverse Council supports the Corporate Plan Objective, 'an ambitious and innovative Council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities'.

## 5. **Implications Against Each Option**

### 5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

There are no financial implications for signing up to the Diverse Council Declaration.

### 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There is a reputational risk to the Council if it does not support and sign up to being a diverse Council.

### 5.3 ***Legal***

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

### 5.4 ***Human Resources***

The WLGA is working with the Welsh Government and Councils on promoting and supporting greater diversity.

5.5 The Council will look to address the areas required for implementation by developing an action plan that will be implemented up to the local elections in May 2022 and beyond by providing a package of training, development and support for councillors when elected as part of the induction programme.

## 6. **Supporting Evidence**

### 6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

Performance information across Wales shows that there are many underrepresented groups when looking at the makeup of local Councils.

6.1.2 Data shows that there remains a significant lack of diversity in Welsh councils. In Wales' local authorities:

- 28% of councillors and 29% of Cabinet members are women.
- Councillors are proportionately older than the general adult population (47% of councillors were aged 60 years or older) and a higher proportion of councillors were retired (31%).
- Only about 1.8% of councillors are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) compared to 4.7% for the Welsh population and few hold senior positions.
- 11% of councillors stated that they had a disability, and there remain a range of challenges for disabled people participating in the democratic process

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

It is widely acknowledged that equal representation is not only an issue of representational fairness but essential for the quality of policy development and decision making. Decisions will be better when they are taken by people with lived experience of an issue. The 'right person for the job' of councillor needs to be a member of the community they serve, in order to fully and consistently understand the lives and needs of that community.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

The Council will look to be a diverse council by engaging with the community, particularly those with protected characteristics and taking learning from this engagement to enhance services moving forward.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

By supporting a more representative approach to democracy the Council will be supporting long term thinking.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

By supporting a more representative approach to democracy the Council will be able to make decisions that support all aspects of the community and that won't negatively impact any underrepresented groups in the community.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The Council will work alongside the Welsh Government and WLGA to support diverse Councils.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

The Council will work across service areas to support diversity.

6.8 ***EqlA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***

By signing up to the Diverse Council Declaration the Council is supporting equalities legislation.

- 6.8.1 The action plan that is to be developed will also identify where the Council will be able to support those with protected characteristics who are elected to be Councillors.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The action plan will be considered by the Democratic Services Committee and will be implemented up to the local elections in May 2022 and beyond for those elected.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- Appendix 1 – Diverse Council Declaration.