

Committee: **Democratic Services Committee**
 Date of meeting: **17th September 2021**
 Report Subject: **Diverse Council Action Plan**
 Portfolio Holder: **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	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	09/09/21			17/09/21			30/09/21	

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 To present to Democratic Service Committee the Draft Diverse Council Action Plan for consideration.

2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 Background
 Providing opportunities to become a more diverse Council can lead to better engagement with individuals and communities, in turn leading to greater levels of confidence and trust and better decision making informed by a wider range of perspectives and lived experiences.

 - 2.2 The WLGA has committed to making a change in local government diversity at the 2022 Local Elections as it is acknowledged that despite previous action and campaigns, progress has been slow and it is recognised that there remains a lack of diversity in councils.

 - 2.3 The evidence base, barriers and challenges to attracting more diverse councillors has been identified as:
 - Time-commitment and meeting times;
 - Political and organisational culture;
 - Childcare and other caring responsibilities;
 - Public criticism and online abuse;
 - Remuneration and impact on employment; and
 - Lack of diverse role models and incumbency.

 - 2.4 On 29th July 2021, Council signed 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.

2.5 Action Plan

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.

2.6 In addition, as part of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 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.

2.7 As part of the above, a draft action plan has been developed and is attached at appendix 1. The action plan sets out intended activity ahead of the 2022 local elections and the work to be progressed in the longer term.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The report and action plan were considered by CLT at their meeting on 9th September who endorsed the action plan for implementation.

3.2 **Option 1**

For Democratic Services Committee to endorse the action plan, attached at appendix 1, before submission to Council on 30th September for approval.

Option 2

For Democratic Services Committee to consider the action plan, attached at appendix 1, and provide comment for amendment before submission to Council on 30th September for approval.

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

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. 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 direct financial implications from implementing the Diverse Council Action Plan and all activity will be undertaken within current resources.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There is a reputational risk to the Council if it does not support actions to becoming 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.

The Council is looking to address the areas required for becoming a diverse Council by implementing the action plan 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***

6.1.1 Blaenau Gwent data*:

Population

Total Blaenau Gwent population – 69,814.

Male population – 34,325

Female population – 35,489

6.1.2 Age

The median age of both the Blaenau Gwent and Wales population is 41.

Age	Blaenau Gwent	Wales
0-4	5.8%	5.8%
5-14	10.9%	11.1%
15-24	13.3%	13.4%
25-29	6.1%	6.1%
30-44	19.4%	18.6%
45-59	20%	19.9%
60-64	6.6%	6.7%
65-74	10%	9.8%
75+	7.9%	8.6%

6.1.3 Ethnicity

98.4% of the population are white.

0.5% are Asian or Asian British

0.1% are Chinese

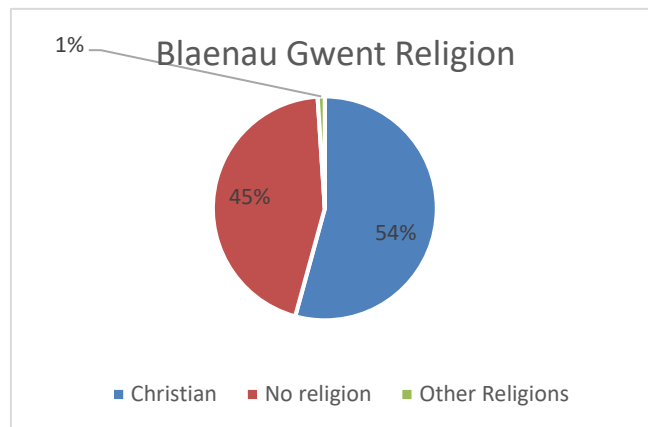
0.6% have a mixed ethnicity

0.1% other ethnicity

6.1.4 Disability

Blaenau Gwent continues to have significantly above average levels of disability with a total of 31.6% of working age people being defined as disabled (EA core or work-limiting disabled) compared to 22.8% for Wales.

6.1.5 Religion



- 54% of the Blaenau Gwent population identify as being Christian
- 45% have no religion
- 1% identify as a different form of religion (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, Buddhist, other).

6.1.6 Sexual Orientation

Statistics on sexual orientation for Blaenau Gwent are not available with any level of accuracy. However, the Annual Population Survey includes data on sexual identity for Wales on a calendar year basis. In 2017, this survey showed that in Wales:

- 95.0% of people identified as heterosexual;
- 1.3% as gay/lesbian;
- 0.7% as bisexual;
- 0.5% as 'other'; and
- 2.5% of people did not answer the question.

Trends across Wales are stable with no significant change.

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

6.1.8 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 development of the initial Action Plan has been progressed with involvement with a range of internal and external partners. It is anticipated that involvement will be a continuing part of the review and delivery of the plan 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, WLGA and other Local Authorities to support diverse Councils.

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

In order to develop the draft action plan a cross service area group was developed and will be maintained in order to deliver the identified actions to becoming a diverse Council.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

The action plan supports the promotion and delivery of holding remote committee meetings and using IT rather than paper to support a reduction in travel and printing.

6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***

The Professional Lead for Engagement, Equalities & Welsh Language has been involved in the development of this action plan.

The action plan looks to support those from all under represented backgrounds.

6.9b. ***Equality Impact Assessment***

The Professional Lead for Engagement, Equalities & Welsh Language has been involved in the development of this action plan.

The action plan looks to support those from all under represented backgrounds.

7. ***Monitoring Arrangements***

7.1 The action plan will form part of the Forward Work Programme for the Democratic Services Committee.

The plan will be kept under review with additional actions considered during the life of the plan.

Actions will be included within the relevant business plans.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix 1 Diverse Council Action Plan*