

Committee: **Democratic Services Committee**

Date of meeting: **27th March 2023**

Report Subject: **Diverse Council Action Plan Update**

Portfolio Holder: **Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Sarah King, Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships**
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Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	02/03/23			24/03/23			30/03/23	

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 To provide a progress update on the Diverse Council Action Plan.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 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 evidence base, barriers and challenges to attracting more diverse councillors have 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.
 - 2.3 On 29th July 2021, Blaenau Gwent Council signed up to becoming a diverse Council in order 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.
 - 2.4 As part of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 there are a number of expectations on Councils to support diversity in the democratic process and also for political parties to support the process of becoming a councillor and supporting councillors once they become elected.

- 2.5 In order to progress the requirements and promote diversity in democracy, a Diverse Council Action Plan was established and agreed by Council in September 2021.
- 2.6 The agreed action plan, including progress updates is attached at appendix 1.
- 3. **Options for Recommendation**
 - 3.1 The report and action plan were considered by CLT at their meeting on 2nd March 2023.
 - 3.2.1 **Option 1**
For Democratic Services Committee to be satisfied with the action taken to date, identified in appendix 1, and not make any amendments to future actions.
 - 3.2.2 **Option 2**
For Democratic Services Committee to consider the action plan, attached at appendix 1, and provide comment for amendment before submission to Council.
- 4. **Evidence of how 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 underrepresented groups to stand for election. Political parties across Wales are also encouraged to support this process.
 - 4.2 Being a diverse Council supports the Corporate Plan Objective, '*An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place*'.
- 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.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

The action plan identified 30 actions, of these:

- 19 are completed; and
- 11 are in progress.

Appendix 1 provides information on the activity undertaken to date.

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)***

6.3.1 The implementation of the Action Plan is to be undertaken across a number of teams, including partners.

6.3.2 The Engagement and Participation Strategy will be key in the implementation and achievement of the action plan and it will outline how we, as a Council, will work with the community to promote and encourage a diverse Council.

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. Decisions will be made to positively 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 effectively implement the action plan actions have been allocated to a number of teams supporting the council to become more diverse.

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.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IAA)***

- 6.9.1 The Professional Lead for Engagement, Equalities & Welsh Language has been involved in the development of this action plan.
- 6.9.2 The action plan looks to support those from all underrepresented backgrounds.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

- 7.1 The action plan will form part of the Forward Work Programme for the Democratic Services Committee and Council.
- 7.1.1 The plan will be kept under review with additional actions considered during the life of the plan.
- 7.1.2 Actions will be included within the relevant business plans.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix 1 Diverse Council Action Plan*