

17 September 2021

To: The Local Government and Housing Committee

### **Consultation on priorities for the Local Government and Housing Committee**

As a coalition of organisations working in the diversity sector, we believe that diversity in local government should be a key issue for the Local Government and Housing Committee during the Sixth Senedd.

Local councillors are not currently representative of the communities they serve and are lagging behind other levels of government in Wales in terms of representation. Data shows that 28% of councillors and 29% of Cabinet members are women. Only about 1.8% of councillors are from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background compared to 4.7% of the Welsh population and few of these hold senior positions. In contrast 47% of councillors are over 60 years old and 31% are retired, higher proportions than in the wider Welsh population. Especially with regard to gender representation, Members of the Senedd and Members of Parliament are far more representative of the electorate than councillors, while information on other protected characteristics is lacking completely.

This lack of representation hinders local government in two ways. Firstly, the over-dominance of white older male councillors in Wales can serve to alienate voters who do not see themselves reflected in their local council chambers. This detachment has direct effects on engagement, including turnout at local elections.

Secondly, research shows that a diversity of political representatives leads to better outcomes through a more varied collection of ideas and opinions. Council chambers that are more representative and understanding of the communities they serve are better positioned to engage with communities, inspire higher levels of trust and make better decisions informed by a wide range of perspectives and lived experience.

We welcome the actions that have been taken through the Welsh Government's Diversity in Democracy programme and the WLGA Council's commitment to achieve a 'step change' at the 2022 local elections, such as the commitment to encourage all councils to make a declaration on becoming 'Diverse Councils' by July 2021 and to set out an action plan of activity ahead of the 2022 local elections. The Diversity in Democracy Programme and WLGA Council's commitment are important steps in the right direction as they made important recommendations on actions that can be taken by individual Councils to increase equality and diversity of representation.

**We would welcome an assessment at next year's local elections of the impact these measures have had and also what other measures could be taken to boost diversity if the assessment should find no significant progress.** One thing currently missing which has hampered diversity appraisals in the past is good quality data. It is vital that equality and diversity monitoring data is collected for **all** elected councillors as well as all candidates



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standing in the 2022 local elections and all future elections if we are to evaluate the impacts of diversity boosting measures in a meaningful way.

We would further like to raise our concern over the move of committees to meetings every two weeks rather than one as we are worried about the potential impact this may have on diversity. This clearly applies to all committees rather than this one particularly, but we would encourage the Local Government and Housing Committee to consider the diversity of witnesses and organisations giving evidence as part of any inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Fookes

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Jess Blair

**Director of Electoral Reform Society (ERS) Cymru**

Kay Denyer

**Director of Race Council Cymru (RCC)**

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**Our campaign is supported by the following organisation:**



Action for Children, Chwarae Teg, Citizens Advice Swansea Neath Port Talbot, Co-production Network for Wales, Cynon Taf Community Housing Group, Disability Wales, Diverse Cymru, Fair Treatment for the Women of Wales (FTWW), Institute of Welsh Affairs (IWA), Llamau, National Federation of Women's Institutes (the WI), Oxfam Cymru, Race Alliance Wales, Social Firms Wales, Stonewall Cymru, Tai Pawb, Together Creating Communities, Welsh Women's Aid.