



WLGA Response Local Government and Housing Committee Inquiry Response

To assess progress made to improve diversity in local government since passing the Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021 and any tangible impact on candidates standing for election.

A review conducted by the WLGA following the local elections suggested that the gender split of serving councillors in Wales is now 64% male, to 36% female.

While this is still somewhat off gender parity, it does indicate a general shift towards achieving more equal representation across both sexes in local government. Positively, two councils in Wales, Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan, have for the first time now reached parity levels of 50%+ female councillors.

Further evidence of this trend can be seen within the number of female cabinet members, which has in nominal terms, risen over 20% from the final year of the last election cycle, to the first year of the current cycle.

The total number of female cabinet members across Wales (71 or 36%) is equivalent to the proportion of female councillors overall.

Conversely, over the same period a slight drop in the proportion of female leaders can also be noted (6 to 4), but with an increase in the number of female deputy leaders (8 to 12).

It should be noted that while local government is making progress in terms of gender representation, the picture for local government across other protected characteristics is less clear. Equality monitoring information for elected members is not evenly collected at local authority level.

It is difficult to evaluate whether any increases or improvements to diversity among candidates and elected councillors relate directly to the implementation of the Local Government and Elections Act (2021) specifically. However as has been noted in previous submissions to the committee, the WLGA has been supportive of the changes introduced through the act.



Number of female councillors and cabinet member

	Councillors	No. of Women Cllrs	% Women Cllrs
Blaenau Gwent	33	10	30.03%
Bridgend	51	14	27.40%
Caerphilly	69	26	37.68%
Cardiff	79	33	41.77%
Carmarthenshire	75	25	33.33%
Ceredigion	38	9	23.68%
Conwy	55	23	41.80%
Denbighshire	48	20	41.66%
Flintshire	67	24	35.80%
Gwynedd	69	24	34.78%
Merthyr	30	8	26.66%
Monmouthshire	46	24	52.17%
Neath Port Talbot	60	23	38.33%
Newport	51	16	31.37%
Pembrokeshire	60	13	21.66%
Powys	68	22	32.35%
RCT	75	35	46.66%
Swansea	75	31	41.33%
Torfaen	40	17	42.50%
Vale	54	27	50.00%
Wrexham	56	15	26.78%
Ynys Mon	34	9	26.47%
Total	1233	448	36.33%

2021-22	New Term
No of Women Cabinet Members	No of Women Cabinet Members
2	2
2	2
2	4
3	5
4	3
3	1
4	4
1	5
1	1
2	4
2	3
4	5
3	3
3	5
2	2
5	3
4	4
2	4
4	4
3	4
2	1
1	2
59	71

Table outlining profile of councillors by sex following 2022 Local Government elections.



To consider the progress in implementing the recommendations in the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's 2019 report on diversity in local government.¹

Recommendation 2: We recommend that the Welsh Government works with the Welsh Local Government Association to identify three local authority areas to trial the use of video communication methods to facilitate participation by remote attendance at council meetings.

The Covid pandemic precipitated a huge shift to remote working and multi-location meetings, however three years after the start of the pandemic, councils across Wales continue to use this approach for meetings and are satisfying the requirements set out in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021². The speed and extent to which local government has adopted a culture of remote working has been very fast and the same speed of adoption would likely not have been possible without the unique and immediate circumstances created by the pandemic.

While this quick and sudden shift was not without challenges, feedback from councils suggests that these have now largely been resolved. Since the local elections the WLGA, and many local councils, have considered how digital literacy, and remote meeting management are incorporated into councillor inductions, and this will continue to be iteratively improved.

Recommendation 6 We recommend that the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association start work on a positive campaign to increase diversity among candidates standing for local government elections by summer 2019.

Ahead of the local elections in 2022, the WLGA brought together a cross party working group of councillors to make recommendations. This included councils making Diversity Declarations and the WLGA establishing a new "Be a Councillor" website and new councillors guide website. [Be a Councillor. Be the Change – WLGA](#)

Where support has been available through networks such as WEN, the WLGA has promoted this with councils to encourage take-up. Similarly, the WLGA has worked with these networks to encourage greater support to promote diversity.

The WLGA continues to raise awareness of the value of EDI across all aspects of local government, through the development of guidance, training, partnership working, and sector-led support, to encourage greater understanding and diversity.

Recommendation 9: We recommend that the Welsh Government, in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association and the Electoral

¹ [Diversity in local government \(senedd.wales\)](#)

² [21-18-local-government-and-elections-wales-act-2021.pdf \(senedd.wales\)](#)



Commission, urgently addresses deficiencies in guidance for elected representatives, candidates and prospective candidates on what does and does not constitute acceptable behaviour on social media.

Working in partnership with the LGA, NILGA and COSLA, the WLGA has been involved with a programme of work entitled “Civility in Public Life”, which is primarily aimed at:

- articulating good standards for anyone engaging in public and political discourse
- understand the scale and impact of intimidation and abusive behaviour on our membership organisations, and develop recommendations for achieving positive debate and public decision-making on a local level
- to support our members and all democratically elected local representatives in addressing intimidation and abuse, so they deliver the best on behalf of their communities

The WLGA continues to work across the four nations to deliver a coordinated response on this issue, and has coproduced a number of shared handbook to support councillors in how to deal with online abuse and harassment. In addition to this, the WLGA updated its range of councillor handbooks, and also developed a suite of e-learning modules which included modules on Social Media Awareness, these have been used by councils to complement their own member induction programmes.

Through the WLGA, the 22 leaders agreed to adopt a Fair Campaigns Pledge ahead of the 2022 local elections which was adopted and implemented by political group leaders locally. The Fair Campaigns pledges commits candidates to running a fair and respectful election campaign which is based on positive campaigning and merit, rather than personal attacks and smears against individuals.

Feedback from WLGA officer networks suggests that while the pledge represents a positive step forward, the efficacy of this campaign remains unclear, this may be owing to the non-binding nature of the pledge, but also because of candidates needing further guidance on implementing the pledge in practice.

Delivery of the ambitions of the pledge was also made more challenging by the high number of independent candidates at local elections, with pledges being organised through political parties, and that a councillor’s code of conduct is not applicable to candidates who have not yet been elected.

Recommendation 10: We recommend that the Welsh Government and local authorities review the robustness of support mechanisms for members



experiencing online abuse, harassment or bullying and implement changes to strengthen this support.

Prior to the elections, the WLGA's Improvement Team reviewed and updated its councillor handbooks and guides, these included;

- Personal safety for councillors
- Councillors guide to handling intimidation
- Councillors guide to social media
- Social media and online abuse

This review process was co-produced with the LGA with reference to local authority democratic services teams.

The Improvement Team also developed a suite of e-learning modules which included both modules on Social Media Awareness, these have been used by councils to complement their own member induction programmes.

Some councils held seminars for councillors, and invited representatives from the WLGA to discuss and sign-post to national resources, along with representatives from the local police force to discuss local support.

Recommendation 13: We recommend that the Welsh Government encourage local authorities to adopt a consistent approach to reporting on the care allowance claimed by councillors, by reporting this on a collective basis per allowance rather than detailing each allowance claimed by individual members.

In March 2021 the WLGA's council agreed to encourage all councillors to claim any necessary allowances or expenses that they might incur. This included care allowance claimed by councillors.

To explore research and analysis being undertaken by the Welsh Government, partner bodies and others on the diversity of candidates and outcomes following the 2022 local elections.

The Local Government Candidates Survey is a helpful tool in determining a broad picture of where local councils are in terms of candidate diversity, however the low response rate to this survey is a challenge.

Encouraging councils to collect comprehensive equalities monitoring information when councillors are onboarded, and passing this information through to Welsh Government may ensure a more accurate understanding of diversity across local



government. This may be further supported by enactment of Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010.

To explore areas of innovation and good practice that may help increase diversity in local government

As outlined above, prior to the election all 22 local council leaders agreed to support a Fair Campaigns Pledge ahead of the local elections. This was adopted and implemented by political groups and leaders locally. The Fair Campaigns pledges commits candidates to running a fair and respectful election campaign which is based on positive campaigning and merit, rather than personal attacks and smears against individuals.

Feedback from WLGA officer networks suggests that while the declaration represents a positive step forward, the efficacy of this campaign remains unclear, and candidates would benefit from clearer practical guidance. Delivery of the ambitions of the pledge was also made more challenging by the high number of independent candidates at a local level.

Some councils exploring locally how they can develop a programme of support for female councillors. This will be monitored and considered in the wider context of sector led support. As well as working to ensure a gender balanced executive, the Vale of Glamorgan have also taken proactive steps to engage some of their youngest members as chairs/vice chairs on committees such as scrutiny.

Following the enactment of the Local Government and Elections Act (2021), the WLGA supported local councils in their recruitment of lay persons to their Governance and Audit Committees. It was hoped that new flexibility around remote meetings would enable councils to access a broader range of lay members. However feedback from officers suggests that diversity of lay members remains relatively low, and that many lay members appear on a number of committees across a number of different councils, suggesting that further work is required to ensure all groups across society understand the role they could play in supporting council governance.