

DLG 12

Ymchwiliad i amrywiaeth ym maes llywodraeth leol

Inquiry into diversity in local government

Ymateb gan: Unison Cymru/Wales

Response from: Unison Cymru/Wales

UNISON Cymru/Wales
UNISON House
Custom House Street
Cardiff
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I write to you enclosing UNISON Cymru/Wales' response to your inquiry on diversity in local government.

UNISON Cymru/Wales is Wales' largest public sector trade union. UNISON has 100,000 members working in public services across Wales. We welcome the opportunity to feed into the Committee's inquiry.

We represent full-time and part-time staff who provide public services, although they may be employed in both the public and private sectors. More than two thirds of our members are women and our members work at every level in public services. In local government this includes people working for local councils, schools, libraries, social care and private companies.

UNISON Cymru/Wales has an overarching strategy and vision for how local government should look in the future. For this reason, UNISON Cymru/Wales submitted our strategy paper 'Local Government – Moving Forward' to Welsh Government's consultation on the Green Paper for Strengthening Local Government and Delivering for People.

Part of UNISON Cymru/Wales' response to the Green Paper was dedicated to improving diversity in local government in the future. UNISON Cymru/Wales would like to submit this section to Committee's inquiry.

UNISON Cymru/Wales hopes that Committee will take our members' views into account whilst investigating the issues surrounding diversity in local government.

We would be pleased to discuss this with Committee in further detail.

I would be very grateful for acknowledgment of receipt of this response.

Best wishes,

Bethan Thomas
Head of Local Government
UNISON Cymru/Wales

Diversity in local government – moving forward

Fair representation and proportionality are the key principles underpinning representation within UNISON Cymru/Wales and we strongly believe that in order to ensure that the democratic structures within local authorities are representative of the communities that they serve, intervention by way of legislation is required.

Welsh Government may consider legislating to ensure that wards have a gender balance of elected representatives and consideration of positive action to encourage citizens with protected characteristics to commit to public service.

The Welsh Government should review the remuneration of councillors. The current allowance system has ensured council chambers across the country are not representative of their communities, which includes a third being young people.

The number of days needed to attend council meetings and undertake council duties should be extended with companies/organisations being compensated for supporting their staff to carry out this important community function.

Local authorities should also look at the availability of crèche and childcare facilities to encourage those with caring responsibilities to engage in and contribute to public life.

UNISON Cymru/Wales notes that the Scottish Parliament operates the only facility of its type in Europe, providing supervision for children of people visiting the Scottish Parliament.

The Scottish Parliament provides childcare for individuals participating in a guided tour, meeting an MSP or member of staff, taking part in Parliament's business meetings, watching parliamentary business live in the Chamber or committee rooms, attending an event, browsing and having coffee in the cafe. Such an approach strives to create an open and accessible democratic structure.

UNISON Cymru/Wales feels that such an approach should be considered at a local and national level in Wales.

UNISON Cymru/Wales considers that in order to make democratic structures representative within local government, a body of work needs to be undertaken to ensure that the purpose, structure and powers of local government are truly understood by the communities they serve.

UNISON Cymru/Wales believes that this education should start at school-level within PSE Active Citizenship. UNISON Cymru/Wales believes that trade unions, such as UNISON Cymru/Wales, have a role to play in the shaping of the curriculum in this regard and the promotion of a social contract between citizens, communities, local and national governments.