



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Draft diversity and inclusion guidance for registered political parties

Voluntary guidance for registered political parties.

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Contents

Overview

Introduction

Background

Senedd reform: committee recommendations

Diversity of elected representatives

Specified characteristics and circumstances

Part 1: Diversity and inclusion strategies for all Welsh elections

Part 2: Diversity information on Senedd candidates

Part 3: Voluntary quotas for women at Senedd elections

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Overview

This guidance is for registered political parties and is voluntary. We hope however that parties standing candidates at Welsh elections will take the suggested actions as part of their commitment to achieving our shared aim of creating a more diverse Senedd.

To note: references made throughout this document to 'political parties' or 'parties', refer to registered political parties ('registered political party' means a party registered under Part 2 of the Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000). References made to 'strategies' or 'strategy', refer to political parties' diversity and inclusion strategies.

Introduction

This document contains guidance for registered political parties on various measures which they may consider taking. As part of that consideration, political parties may need to seek legal advice as to whether a proposed measure would be lawful in their circumstances and on how to comply with their legal obligations in pursuing it. It is the responsibility of parties to ensure that they comply with the law in taking any action in light of this guidance. This includes, but is not limited to, compliance with obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Further advice and guidance on UK GDPR can be found on the [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\) website](#).

Further [advice and guidance on discrimination by associations](#) can be found on the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) website. The EHRC have also produced [guidance for political parties](#) on what the Equality

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Act 2010 means for political parties and their members.

Parts 1 and 2 of this guidance are issued under section 30 of the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024. Part 3 of this guidance is issued under the Welsh Ministers powers in sections 60 and 62 of the Government of Wales Act 2006.

Background

A significant amount of work has been undertaken over recent years to consider what reforms may be needed to make the Senedd fit for the 21st century.

This has led to a number of changes being introduced for the 2026 Senedd election, including an increase in the number of Members of the Senedd to enhance its capacity to scrutinise the work of the Government. From 2026, 6 Members of the Senedd will be elected to represent each of the new 16 constituencies across Wales, making a total of 96 Members of the Senedd, and these Members will be elected under a proportional, closed list electoral system.

In addition to these electoral system and boundary reforms, committees over the years have concluded that steps should be taken to make the Senedd more diverse and representative of the Welsh population.

The reports have focused on removing the cultural, structural and financial barriers people face in standing for elected office, and the challenges faced by some as they seek to stay in office. They have also called for greater transparency around political parties' efforts to facilitate diversity and inclusion among candidates and the diversity of Senedd candidates and Members of the Senedd.

All political groups within the Senedd have expressed their commitment to

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increasing diversity amongst Senedd Members, including improving the representation of women and individuals from other under-represented groups, including people with intersectional identities. Members across the political spectrum have recognised that each party has a shared responsibility to make this happen, and that action on a number of fronts is needed.

This guidance is being published as a tool to support political parties as they consider practical steps they can take to contribute to the shared ambition of increasing diversity of our elected representatives, and ensure they reflect the communities they represent.

Senedd reform: committee recommendations

The Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, the Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform and the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform have all called for measures to make the Senedd more diverse and representative of the people it serves.

The Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform reported in 2017 ([A Parliament that works for Wales](#)) that they:

“ ‘strongly believed that the selection and election of a more diverse Assembly would enhance the operation of the Assembly and the way it works for and represents the people of Wales. ’ ”

The 2017 Expert Panel also recommended that Senedd reform legislation should include provision that would secure the availability of information regarding diversity.

The Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform in 2020 ([Senedd reform: the next steps](#)) reported that throughout its inquiry it had ‘repeatedly heard persuasive

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arguments about the benefits of diversity among elected representatives’, going on to recommend that:

“ ‘Political parties which contest Senedd elections should prepare and publish diversity and inclusion strategies which assess the diversity and inclusivity of their culture, processes, ways of working and representation, and set out the actions they intend to take to increase the diversity of their memberships, candidates and elected Members’. ”

The same committee concluded that ‘while the Senedd has performed relatively strongly in terms of gender-balanced representation, there has consistently been a lack of visible diversity in terms of ethnicity and disability’, and recommended that political parties should voluntarily collect, anonymise, and publish data about the diversity of their candidates for Senedd elections.

The Special Purpose Committee on Senedd reform, reporting in May 2022, made several recommendations aimed at increasing the diversity of the Senedd, using transparency and information to drive change, and to identify and remove barriers to public office. The following recommendations are of particular relevance to this guidance:

- “We recommend that Senedd reform legislation includes provisions that encourage each political party standing candidates in a Senedd election to prominently publish a diversity and inclusion strategy, setting out how it has sought to facilitate diversity within its candidates, at least six months prior to the scheduled Senedd election”.
- “We recommend that a legislative requirement is placed upon a devolved Welsh Authority to collect and prominently publish anonymised candidate diversity data”. ”

Reforming our Senedd – A stronger voice for the people of Wales, 2022

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The Welsh Government welcomes these recommendations and is publishing this guidance to support political parties to take action in both these important areas.

Alongside this work, the Senedd Commission has plans for reviewing its procedures and practices with a view to attracting and retaining as wide and diverse a range of Members as possible. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, Members of the Senedd have been able to participate remotely in Plenary and committee proceedings, and the Senedd Commission utilises technology to help remove barriers to participation in Senedd business. In addition, consideration is being given to job sharing for committee chairs and work to adapt the Siambr to accommodate 96 Members will look to ensure that any future changes in ways of working take account of the needs of all those who wish to stand for election to the Senedd (further detail can be found in the [Llywydd's letter to the Reform Bill Committee](#), dated 15 April 2024). The Independent Remuneration Board's thematic review on Members' pay and personal support, in considering changes required for the Seventh Senedd, is also considering how barriers may be removed to support diversity of Members ([Strategic Work Programme 2022-26](#)).

In October 2024, the Senedd established a [Future Senedd Committee](#) which will report by 9 May 2025. Part of the remit of this committee will be to consider solutions to barriers (real and perceived) which may, or have the potential to, impede the Senedd's ability to represent people of all backgrounds, life experiences, preferences and beliefs. The committee will consider this guidance for political parties as part of its work.

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What do we know about the diversity of our elected representatives in local government and in the Senedd?

There is currently limited information publicly available about political parties' strategies, and specifically how they intend to take action to improve diversity amongst prospective candidates for local and Senedd elections. By publishing strategies, political parties would be more transparent about what they are doing to promote diversity among the candidates representing them at Welsh elections, and how they help candidates overcome barriers to participation in Welsh elections.

There is some information available about the diversity of local government candidates and elected Members, however this does not provide a comprehensive picture as local government survey response rates are low.

Information currently available shows that (of those who responded) at the last local government election in 2022 ([Local Government Candidates Survey: 2022](#)):

- 40% of elected County Councillors surveyed were female (43% of Community Councillors).
- 46% of elected County Councillors were aged 60 years or older (56% of Community Councillors).
- 96% of elected County and Community Councillors reported they were from a white ethnic group.
- 89% of elected County Councillors reported they were heterosexual or straight (88% of Community Councillors), 6% reported they were lesbian, gay or bisexual (5% of Community Councillors).
- 1% of all candidates responded that the gender they identify with is not the same as their sex registered at birth. 2% chose not to respond.

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- 13% of elected County Councillors considered themselves to be a disabled person (15% of Community Councillors).

For the Senedd election in 2021, the Senedd Research service noted ([Election 2021: How diverse is the Sixth Senedd?](#)) that there is limited information publicly collected about the diversity and backgrounds of Members of the Senedd. The research did however identify the following:

- 43% of elected Members were women (compared with 40% in the House of Commons following the July 2024 general election ([Female Members of Parliament](#)), 46% in the Scottish Parliament, and 37% in the Northern Ireland Assembly ([Women in politics and public life](#))).
- 5% of elected Members came from an ethnic minority background.
- 5% publicly identified as LGBT+.
- No information is currently captured on the number of Members who identify as a disabled person.

By comparison, according to the 2021 Census:

- Women made up 51.1% of the population of Wales ([Population and household estimates, Wales: Census 2021](#)).
- 93.8% of the population identified as being from a white ethnic group ([Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion in Wales](#)).
- 3% of the population identified as LGBT+, and 7.6% opted not to answer about their sexual orientation ([Sexual orientation - Census 2021](#)).
- 21.1% of the population of Wales were disabled ([Disability, England and Wales - Census 2021](#)).

The Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform reported in 2020 that ‘while the Senedd has performed relatively strongly in terms of gender-balanced representation, there has consistently been a lack of visible diversity in terms of ethnicity and disability’ ([Senedd reform: the next steps](#)).

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Any appropriately anonymised information political parties publish about the diversity of Senedd candidates will complement information published about local government candidates using the existing process established through the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. It will also provide a holistic picture of representation across devolved elections in Wales rather than local government or the Senedd in isolation. This information could then be used to inform decisions on actions needed to improve representation at an all-Wales level.

This guidance is split into 3 parts as follows:

PART 1: Guidance for political parties about developing, publishing, implementing and regularly reviewing strategies for local and national Welsh elections.

PART 2: Guidance for political parties standing candidates at Senedd elections about collecting, collating and publishing diversity information relating to candidates and elected Members.

PART 3: Guidance for political parties standing candidates at Senedd elections on voluntary quotas for women.

Specified characteristics and circumstances

For the purposes of Parts 1 and 2 of this guidance, set out below are the specified characteristics and circumstances political parties should aim to include when developing their diversity and inclusion strategies, and about which information should be collected, collated and published.

These characteristics and circumstances include some, but not all, of the protected characteristics defined by the Equality Act 2010. The following characteristics and circumstances have been specified based on the Welsh

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Government's current understanding of which groups may be underrepresented in politics and/or who may face particular barriers in being elected. The Welsh Government has also taken into consideration the characteristics and circumstances currently covered by the local government candidate survey in Wales on the basis that it will be helpful to ensure there is a degree of consistency and comparability between the data sets where possible. Informed by these considerations, the guidance suggests political parties should consider the following characteristics and circumstances when they collect diversity information on Senedd candidates and in developing their strategies:

- Age*
- Disability*
- Race*
- Religion or belief*
- Sex*
- Sexual orientation*
- Trans status or history (including gender reassignment*)
- Socio-economic background
- Health conditions
- Previous political experience
- Caring responsibilities
- Parental responsibility
- Language

* Protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010 (relevant definitions are contained in sections 5-7, and 9-12).

Part 1: Guidance for political parties about developing, publishing, implementing and regularly reviewing strategies for local and national Welsh elections

Purpose

The purpose of this part of the guidance is to support political parties in developing, publishing, implementing and regularly reviewing strategies for local and national Welsh elections.

It is intended to complement Part 2 of the guidance which is about actions political parties should take to publish diversity information on Senedd candidates. This diversity information could help political parties assess how diverse their candidates and elected Members are and could be helpful in informing their strategies to address any underrepresentation identified.

What is a diversity and inclusion strategy?

A diversity and inclusion strategy is a document designed to present the commitment of an organisation to foster a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment. In the context of this guidance, it would present a commitment to increasing the diversity of candidates and elected Members at local and Senedd elections and how it intends to achieve that commitment.

Why should political parties have a strategy?

Having more diverse representation in our elected representatives is about more

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than increasing the diversity of candidates on ballot papers. It is about a long-term cultural change and addressing systemic issues in our political system and the organisational culture of political parties, and consequently better consideration of the full range of experiences and perspectives in decision making. It would also help address the democratic deficit which occurs as a result of a lack of diverse representation in government.

A strategy enables political parties to re-evaluate their internal structures and processes to foster a more inclusive environment, and encourage people from marginalised or disadvantaged groups to overcome barriers to election at all levels of government.

A published strategy requires a long-term commitment to diversity and inclusion, not just around the time of elections, and enables political parties to be transparent about actions they are taking to address under-representation.

Ideas on how to develop a strategy

Political parties should draw on relevant information, research and evidence, such as the published reports referred to in the Appendix to this guidance. This will help political parties to assess what their starting point is, which groups are currently underrepresented, the barriers currently faced by those underrepresented groups, and help target engagement to shape their strategy.

Political parties should engage with stakeholders (including any internal party networks representing underrepresented groups) when developing their strategies. This will help identify the specific barriers faced by people with certain characteristics and individuals in specific circumstances in aspiring towards elected office, along with actions that could be taken to address those barriers. Political parties should be mindful that an intersectional approach may be required, taking into account that some individuals will be able to identify with multiple characteristics or circumstances.

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What should be included in a strategy?

Strategies typically include information that signals a commitment, at the highest level in the organisation, to nurturing a diverse and inclusive culture, openness and transparency. They also typically set out a clear vision for the future and a pathway for realising that vision over the long term, often broken down into manageable short- and medium-term measurable objectives.

A strategy should include the following key elements:

- A commitment to diversity and inclusion from the party's senior leadership, as well as throughout the different levels within the party.
- Clear communication about why diversity and inclusion are important for the party, e.g. how do they fit with the party's values?
- What is the political party's mission in respect of diversity, e.g. what is the end goal, and what does success look like, and how is this grounded in evidence?
- What approach is the party taking to ensure those involved in the party understand and adopt the culture required to enable diversity to thrive.
- An overview of the current position, e.g. what is the baseline data showing about current levels of representation within the party across different groups?
- Setting diversity objectives and measurable targets (Key Performance Indicators).
- How will progress be measured, regular data collection, ongoing comparison against baseline data, qualitative research to understand the experiences of party members, candidates and elected Members over time?
- Training the party could offer to raise awareness of diversity matters.

Actions that should be considered

We have included below some actions that should be taken by political parties to help people with the specified characteristics or in the specified circumstances overcome barriers to election, as well as some of the benefits of doing so. Parties should then document these actions, and the progress made in respect of each, in their strategies.

These actions, and associated benefits, are grouped into 4 broad categories:

- Strategic planning – based on evidence, research and information
- Organisational culture
- Candidate assessment and selection
- Candidate support

Strategic planning - based on evidence, research and information

Actions for parties to consider:

- Assign a dedicated Equality and Diversity Coordinator or Champion at an appropriate level of seniority and consider whether a diversity report could be prepared for the party's Annual Report / consideration at Executive level at an Annual General Meeting (AGM), or at the Annual Conference. The diversity report could be linked to the party's strategy and the actions to which the party is committed through that strategy.
- Use an online toolkit such as the one published by Equal Representation Coalition in Scotland ([Equal Representation in Politics Toolkit](#)), as a means of assessing the party's starting position in terms of diversity and inclusion and to inform the strategy.
- Take account of relevant evidence and research relating to any factors stopping individuals from pursuing a career as local councillors, Members of

Parliament or Members of the Senedd, and consider actions the party can take to address those factors. In the first instance, parties may wish to note the information in the Appendix to this guidance.

- Actively monitor diversity amongst candidates, elected Members, and staff within the organisation. Part 2 of this guidance is intended to help parties undertake this regular monitoring.
- Set realistic and evidence based voluntary targets to increase diversity amongst candidates for election, and for elected Members.
- Publish a strategy to allow all members and the public to see what they are working towards and how they intend to achieve it.

Potential benefits:

- Ensures there is a member of staff at an appropriate level of seniority with a strategic focus on enhancing equality and diversity within the party.
- Provides a point of challenge and accountability to senior management and ensures diversity is integrated into all aspects of the party's work and policies.
- Enables the monitoring of progress against the strategy to report back to senior management for the Annual Report or for consideration at an AGM.
- Demonstrates the party's commitment to increasing diversity and encourages action to meet set targets.
- Regular and consistent quantitative data collection can provide an overview of diversity figures, highlight areas of good practice or those requiring improvement, and help to monitor progress over time.
- Qualitative data collection can collect the thoughts and perspectives of members to identify and address barriers, develop more inclusive ways of working, and gauge response to party initiatives.
- Provides political parties with information on what they are doing well and what they could do differently to encourage diversity and inclusion.

Organisational culture

Actions for parties to consider:

- Demonstrate a fundamental commitment to diversity and inclusion by making it an integral part of the party's constitution.
- Have clear policies in place which reflect the party's commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion.
- Ensure that supporting and encouraging diversity and inclusion forms part of the code of conduct for all staff, volunteers, members, and elected representatives, and that there is awareness among these groups of the party's commitment to diversity and inclusion, including the party's strategy.
- Provide a programme of training and development to all staff, at a local and national level, which includes cultural awareness and the principles of diversity and inclusion.
- Encourage and facilitate networks within the party to represent the interests of people from underrepresented groups.
- Examine the party's processes through an equalities lens to determine whether they are compatible with the cultural, religious, and heritage needs of all people.
- Ensure that the party's manifestos and its advertising, messaging and communications are inclusive and promote diversity.

Potential benefits:

- Reflects the party's commitment, at the highest level, to promoting diversity and inclusion, and removing barriers.
- Demonstrates public accountability, transparency and trust.
- Helps set clear expectations and fosters a more inclusive culture at all levels within the party, ensuring everyone understands the importance and benefits of diversity.
- Empowers networks within the party to represent different interests;

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encourages the involvement of spokespeople from a wide range of backgrounds with different lived experiences; helps to ensure that barriers faced by people from underrepresented groups are communicated and challenges the party to ensure policies and procedures are inclusive.

- Creates a respectful and welcoming working environment, which may attract more diverse membership and staff in future.
- Educates staff about barriers and forms of discrimination and bias that can exist (consciously or unconsciously), the impact these can have and how to reduce them.
- Demonstrates zero tolerance to bullying, harassment, abuse, misogyny, homophobia, racism or disablism.
- Provides reassurance that party members and candidates will be supported if they experience discrimination.

Candidate assessment and selection

Actions for parties to consider:

- Ensure that the party's approach to selection of candidates is accessible and inclusive at all stages. This includes ensuring that selection panels are diverse, that selection panel members have received suitable training on diversity and unconscious bias, the Social Model of Disability and that selection interviews are accessible to all.
- Ask questions of candidates that are directly relevant to their skills or the role, and not questions relating to their personal circumstances or characteristics.
- Consider taking steps to address under-representation by supporting individuals from underrepresented groups to feel able and prepared to put themselves forward for selection. This could include funding peer support programmes and networks for people from underrepresented groups.
- Undertake proactive outreach activities to recruit a diverse range of potential candidates. Using plain language to communicate with prospective

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candidates is important so that people from all walks of life feel included and able to participate.

- Be open and transparent about the party's processes for due diligence in respect of candidates and about the party's selection arrangements, including the steps the party is taking to make these arrangements accessible, objective, fair and inclusive.
- Be open about any criteria for becoming a candidate, for example if there is a requirement for a person to have been a member of a party for a certain length of time before they can stand as a candidate.
- Consider what positive action may be taken as part of the party's selection arrangements to address under-representation. Please note, positive action is voluntary, but if parties do decide to take such steps, they must ensure they are compliant with the Equality Act 2010.

Potential benefits:

- Provides greater confidence to people who may be interested in standing (but who may be lacking in experience or confidence) that they have a realistic prospect of being selected and that they will be supported by the party.
- Provides potential candidates with support during the application process.
- Diversity on a selection panel could help ensure that there are diverse perspectives amongst key decision-makers and mitigates any risk that established or cultural biases or discrimination is perpetuated.
- Demonstrates that the party recognises the value of candidates with a wide range of experiences, backgrounds and perspectives – not just those with previous party experience.
- Increased transparency in the selection process is likely to lead to greater trust in the process.

Candidate support

Actions for parties to consider:

- Introduce mentoring, coaching, and shadowing opportunities for prospective candidates. This could be in the form of a ‘buddy’ scheme arranged within the party. If such schemes are not available within the party, there may be other schemes the party could signpost people to, for example:
 - Equal Power, Equal Voice - which could benefit individuals who have expressed an interest in becoming a local councillor or Member of the Senedd. This programme is led by Women’s Equality Network Wales, in partnership with Disability Wales, Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team (EYST) Wales and Stonewall Cymru. Its aim is to increase diversity of representation in public and political life in Wales.
 - Access to Politics Grassroots Network (**Access to politics**) - which aims to get more disabled people interested and involved in politics including standing for elected office at national and local level in Wales.
- Promote any financial support available within the party or elsewhere for candidates with certain protected characteristics or from marginalised groups, such as the Access to Elected Office Fund.
- Make clear in party documentation what campaign costs will be covered by the party.
- Consider what action can be taken to support disabled candidates with additional costs associated with transport and accessibility, noting that these costs are exempt from campaign spending limits.
- Consider what action can be taken to protect candidates from abuse and intimidation, noting that from 2026 these costs will be exempt from campaign spending limits. Candidates from certain groups typically encounter more discrimination, abuse and hate crime than others. Parties should adopt a robust approach by putting in place an effective, consistent, transparent and accessible process for dealing with complaints of discrimination or abuse that occurs internally within a party.

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- Provide support for both prospective candidates and candidates, including supporting them in reporting abuse and intimidation to appropriate authorities, for example the Police.

Potential benefits:

- Enables people from underrepresented groups to gain knowledge from an experienced person within the party and/or learn from others in similar situations and with similar aspirations.
- Inspires individuals and increases familiarisation with public and political life.
- Provides role models to build the skills, knowledge, confidence, and empowerment needed for individuals to stand for election.
- Supports the development and inclusion of people from underrepresented groups, especially if they feel that the party will take steps to protect them from abuse and intimidation.
- Opens new networks for individuals and could act as a stepping stone to new opportunities.
- Enables individuals to learn from people with lived experience of breaking down barriers to election.
- Ensures that prospective candidates are aware of the support available to them – either from the party, or from other sources.
- Helps to reduce financial barriers to election and encourages people from different backgrounds to seek elected office.
- Addressing abuse, harassment and bullying is essential for supporting people from underrepresented groups, and to make them feel able to put themselves forward as candidates. Guidance around campaign safety and communications, including guidelines around social media can be helpful as a means of ensuring protection and accountability. Political parties may wish to note the guidance by the Equality and Human Rights Commission for political candidates and parties on **Freedom of Expression and Respectful Discourse**.

Publication of strategy: when and where?

Political parties should publish their strategies prominently and in accessible formats on their websites to ensure transparency and visibility.

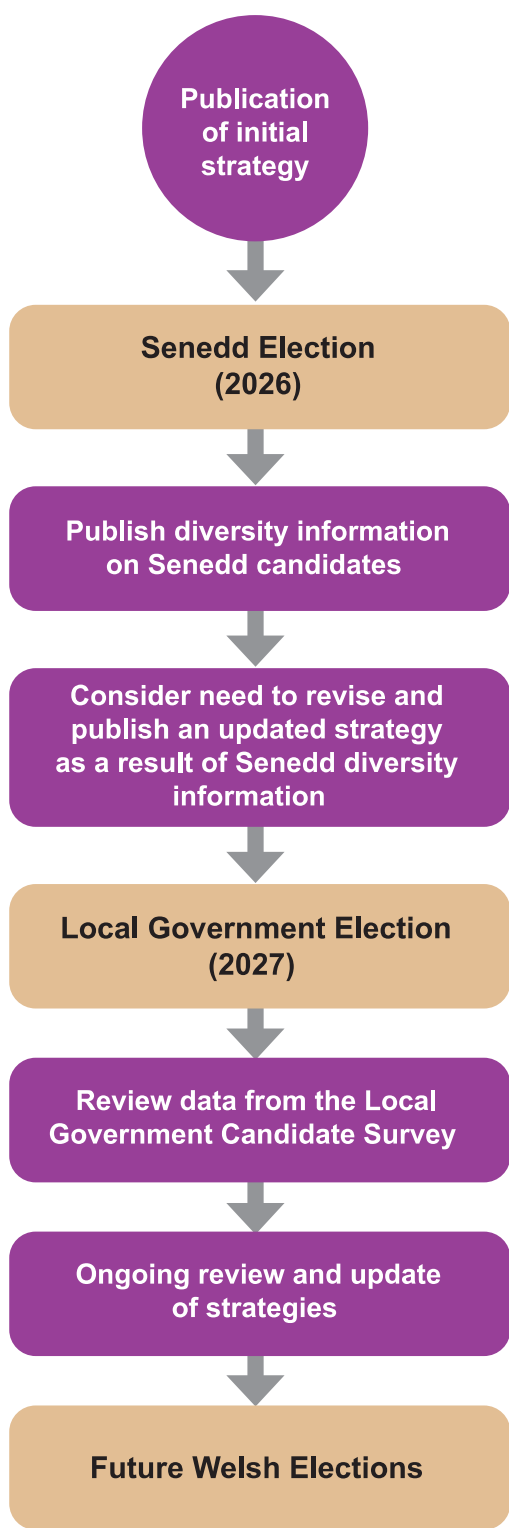
As recommended by the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform, political parties should publish their strategies at least 6 months before the 2026 Senedd election to provide early transparency and ensure voters are adequately informed about the strategy ([Reforming our Senedd – A stronger voice for the people of Wales](#)). While a more detailed strategy is being developed, political parties should consider whether they can publish a Statement of Intent to signal their commitment to diversity and inclusion.

In terms of the strategy which political parties are being encouraged to publish before the 2026 Senedd election, parties will need to use existing knowledge of diversity and inclusion within the party rather than new diversity information on Senedd candidates collected and published as recommended by Part 2 of this guidance. Political parties should then look to review and refresh their strategies ahead of future local government and Senedd elections (using the published diversity information to inform its content) and on an ongoing and regular basis thereafter, with a view to updating their strategies well in advance of national and local elections.

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**Publication
of initial
strategy**

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graph TD; A((Publication of initial strategy)) --> B[Senedd Election (2026)]; B --> C[Publish diversity information on Senedd candidates]; C --> D[Consider need to revise and publish an updated strategy as a result of Senedd diversity information];
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**Senedd Election
(2026)**

**Publish diversity information
on Senedd candidates**

**Consider need to revise and
publish an updated strategy
as a result of Senedd diversity
information**

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Description of figure: A vertical depiction, from top to bottom, of the steps involved in the publication and review of a political party's strategy (as described above).

Using diversity information to help develop a strategy

(see Part 2 for more detail)

The diversity information collected by a political party will be important in shaping its strategy. This information will highlight where there may be under-representation and enable a political party to decide the specific actions to include in the strategy to improve representation. Diversity information can also help political parties assess how successful actions taken to increase diversity have been and consider changes required.

Review mechanism

Strategies should be regularly reviewed by political parties and updated to reflect progress (or otherwise) in improving diversity amongst candidates and elected Members at local and national elections.

Over time, parties should review how well they are performing against the actions previously committed to in their strategy, as well as their objectives, targets and Key Performance Indicators. This will ensure that parties remain accountable for the commitments made to improve diversity.

Compliance with relevant legislation

Political parties are reminded of their obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and of their obligations not to discriminate against their members because of a protected characteristic. Links to relevant guidance can be found in the introduction to the guidance.

Part 2: Guidance for political parties standing candidates at Senedd elections about collecting, collating and publishing diversity information relating to candidates and elected Members

Purpose

The purpose of this part of the guidance is to support political parties to take action to collect, collate and publish anonymised diversity information on Senedd candidates. Currently, this information is not widely captured, with existing processes lacking transparency and consistency, making it difficult to assess the diversity of candidates standing for election to the Senedd and Members of the Senedd.

It is intended to complement Part 1 of the guidance encouraging political parties to publish strategies for local and national Welsh elections.

What is diversity information?

In this context, diversity information means specified information relating to a

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person's personal characteristics or circumstances (see the specified characteristics and circumstances listed in the introduction to the guidance) that can be collected by political parties on candidates representing parties at Senedd elections.

The information can be collected via a survey arranged by the political party. Some political parties already collect this information, however it is not routinely published in relation to Senedd candidates, and currently the process lacks transparency.

Not only can this information help political parties understand what they can and need to do to be part of the ambition of achieving a more diverse Senedd that is representative of the people it is here to serve, but it has the potential to enable organisations such as the Welsh Government, third sector organisations, and political parties themselves, identify steps to support specific groups or remove barriers to participation in politics.

Methods of collection / how and when to collect data

Political parties should use the template survey included later in this section to capture diversity information on their Senedd candidates. Using the same questions creates consistency in what is asked and, consequently, the information that is made publicly available, allowing comparisons to be drawn between Senedd and local government elections.

Political parties should consider the following approaches to collecting and collating diversity information:

- The steps that must be followed to ensure party compliance with **UK GDPR legislation**, which may include (but not be limited to) undertaking a data protection impact assessment (**How do we do a DPIA?**), identifying an appropriate lawful basis for processing, and providing a Privacy Notice

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alongside any survey individuals are asked to complete.

- Making sure that those responsible for handling the data are sufficiently trained to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK GDPR and to protect the confidentiality of respondents (**ICO call for views: Anonymisation, pseudonymisation and privacy enhancing technologies guidance**).
- Asking prospective candidates to complete a survey as part of their application to become a candidate. This may be the optimum time in terms of generating a high response rate.
- Explaining the purpose of collecting the information and emphasising that any information will be published on an anonymised basis to protect the privacy of individuals.
- Whether it is possible to disaggregate the information that is collected into separate groups for publication. Parties should publish diversity information in respect of 'all candidates' and publish the same information separately in relation to 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' candidates.
- Whether it is possible to publish information about the proportion of candidates who share more than one characteristic, e.g. combinations of age and sex as one category, and sex and disability as a separate category. Parties should however ensure that they do not publish anything which might identify individuals.
- Taking into account guidance (**Harmonised standards and guidance**) on data science, techniques and benchmarking (**Simplifying how employers measure socio-economic background**: An accompanying report to new guidance) to improve the comparability and coherence of statistics.

Publication of information

Political parties should publish anonymised diversity information prominently on their websites within 6 weeks of the date of each Senedd election. Making the information available early after the 2026 election, in particular, will ensure this

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valuable information is available to the Senedd and to others who may wish to assess the extent to which the Seventh Senedd is representative of the people of Wales.

As stated above, where possible parties should publish diversity information in respect of 'all candidates' for the relevant election and publish the same information separately in relation to 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' candidates.

When publishing their candidates' data, political parties will need to be careful that the information is not presented in such a way as to enable identification of any individual candidate (**Chapter 2: How do we ensure anonymisation is effective?**). Political parties should be aware that the risk of certain individuals becoming identifiable increases as information is disaggregated or presented on an intersectional basis.

How diversity information should be used to develop a strategy

The initial diversity information collected, collated, and published by political parties will be key to enabling political parties to better understand how representative their Senedd candidates are of the wider Welsh population. The information collected in the first survey will form a baseline to assess progress in future years.

Political parties should use this information to assess which groups of people may be underrepresented, or facing barriers to becoming a candidate or being elected. The information may be used to identify strategies or actions political parties could take to remove or reduce those barriers going forward, and documented in parties' strategies.

Strategies should be regularly reviewed to take account of updated diversity information and progress over time, as well as other research and evidence

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relevant to understanding why some people are less inclined to apply for or enter elected office, or are less successful in being elected.

Diversity information can also be used to assess how effective the strategy and actions taken have been to date, and to enable parties to adjust, refine or expand their approach.

Survey content

A template survey has been developed by the Welsh Government, and political parties should use this as the basis of their survey of Senedd candidates.

The template survey includes questions broadly based on the [Local Government Candidate Survey](#) to maintain consistency and to allow for comparison at a local and national level.

Please note that some questions have been included which do not directly relate to protected characteristics in order to align with the equivalent survey for local government candidates. The Welsh Government will continue to consider how best to ensure alignment between both surveys for future local government and Senedd elections.

Compliance with relevant legislation

Political parties are reminded of their obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and of their obligations under the Equality Act 2010 not to discriminate against their members because of a protected characteristic. Links to relevant guidance can be found in the introduction to the guidance.

[Senedd candidates: diversity survey \(template\)](#)

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Part 3: Guidance for political parties standing candidates at Senedd elections on voluntary quotas for women

A broader range of characteristics

The Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform which reported in 2022 recommended that ‘a relevant committee considers how further work can best be undertaken on examining the merits and implications of legislative diversity quotas for characteristics other than gender’ ([Reforming our Senedd – A stronger voice for the people of Wales](#)), and that for these other characteristics it would be more appropriate to focus, in the first instance, on improving the information available on current levels of representation amongst these groups and on action by political parties to publish diversity and inclusion strategies.

In keeping with the recommendations of the Special Purpose Committee report, Part 1 of this guidance provides suggestions for action for political parties to consider to increase the diversity of elected representatives across a broad range of characteristics and circumstances. Part 2 provides practical advice on how political parties can collect, collate and publish information about the diversity of their candidates, to provide a clear basis for setting their longer term goals and planning what actions may be most appropriate and effective in increasing representation of these groups.

Positive action for these broader characteristics may be something political parties wish to consider [[Footnote 1](#)], but Part 1 of this guidance sets out some important steps that can be taken by all political parties to understand where we are now in terms of representation amongst these characteristics and to remove some of the known barriers to participation by these groups.

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Gender representation and why it is important

The issue of gender representation, particularly in the Senedd, has been explored in more detail by various expert panels and committees in recent years. Part of the reason for this is that candidates' gender is more well observed than other characteristics and circumstances and trends in terms of gender representation since the National Assembly was established in 1999 are well documented.

The Welsh Government is committed to a gender balanced Senedd and wishes to work with others to achieve this ambition now and into the future. The Senedd previously achieved gender balance amongst its Members in 2003. This was largely as a result of some political parties adopting voluntary measures to increase women's representation, including quotas. However, it is recognised that there is more that needs to be done if the Senedd is to broadly reflect the gender make-up of the population in future.

There is considerable international evidence and research relating to the benefits of gender balanced parliaments and relating to the effectiveness of quotas as a means of achieving this. The benefits of having more women in politics are explored in more detail in the Appendix to this guidance. Besides the obvious importance of ensuring that there are role models for other women and girls, research indicates that women tend to focus on policy areas associated, for example, with healthcare, poverty, women's rights, family, and civil society. There is also some evidence that women have a positive effect on the culture within legislatures, championing particular ways of working, and collaborating across the political divide on areas of mutual interest. A more gender-balanced legislature is also shown to strengthen its legitimacy. Growth in the number of women politicians can revitalise democracy, as there is evidence that interest in politics among women voters increases when there are more women candidates.

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How can women's representation in politics be increased?

The number of women standing for election in Wales has historically been low. In 2021, for example, just 31% of Senedd candidates were women ([Senedd Election 2021: Research Briefing](#)).

Therefore, the first step is to draw more women into politics in the first place. The measures suggested in Part 1 of this guidance will be helpful in this regard as political parties may find that by taking these steps they are able to support and encourage more women, including women who represent underrepresented or marginalised groups to stand for elected office.

In addition to recruiting more women, political parties should consider how they can support the election of these candidates to ensure that the Senedd, and the people of Wales, benefit from a broad range of perspectives, capabilities, and skills. This is where voluntary quotas could be a helpful tool. Gender quotas are also considered important in increasing the diversity of candidates more generally, since people's identities are often multidimensional, and women are not a homogenous group ([Senedd reform: the next steps](#)).

What political parties can do to support women to stand for election to the Senedd?

As men typically outnumber women as candidates for Senedd elections, there is a risk that, without action by political parties, the general trend of gender imbalance in our national parliament may be perpetuated. There is a particular risk that the significant expansion of the Senedd, increasing the number of MSs from 60 to 96, could lead to a greater gender imbalance than at present.

Political parties should consider any further action they may be able to take,

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including implementing voluntary quotas for women, with a view to achieving gender balance amongst their candidates that are elected to the Senedd. Implementing voluntary quotas could contribute to the gender balance of the Senedd being more reflective of the population and, in turn, making the Senedd a more effective legislature.

As noted in the Introduction to the guidance, political parties are responsible for ensuring they comply with the law, including any applicable obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Part 7 of that Act contains specific provision (in section 104) regarding the selection of candidates by political parties at Senedd (and other) elections. The [Equality and Human Rights Commission has published guidance](#) for associations, including political parties on what the Equality Act 2010 means for them ([The Equality Act 2010: a guide for political parties](#)).

Political parties may need to review and revise their arrangements for selecting candidates for the scheduled 2026 and future Senedd elections in light of changes to the voting system. In doing so, they should consider whether in their circumstances they may incorporate provisions about the inclusion and placement of women candidates on their candidate lists and what any such provisions should be. Political parties may also wish to consider whether other groups of people who share protected characteristics are under-represented amongst their elected representatives (if they have that information) and, if so, what steps they may be able to take to address it.

In designing any selection processes aimed at increasing the representation of women, political parties should consider the following factors as they are widely recognised as being the 3 important dimensions that make up an effective quota for a closed list proportional voting system, namely:

1. **Representation threshold** – this is setting a minimum proportion of women candidates for a party's candidate lists, e.g. minimum 50% women on each candidate list (a minimum 50% threshold was the model proposed in the Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill which was withdrawn at Stage

2 - further information can be found on the [Reform Bill Committee's website](#))

2. **Vertical criteria** – this is criteria as to the placement of women within a candidate list for a constituency e.g. placing women in alternating positions on the list
3. **Horizontal criteria** – this is criteria as to the proportion of lists that are to have a woman in the first or only position on the list, e.g. ensuring that at least half of a party's candidate lists across Wales start with a woman.

The above elements work well for a statutory system of quotas, which has to apply to all parties, regardless of their circumstances and proportion of representatives in an elected body. It will be for political parties to determine how to approach this matter taking into account their specific circumstances, including their assessment of the more favourable positions on their lists. Some of the organisations who submitted evidence during scrutiny of the Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill emphasised the importance of placing women candidates in what parties assess to be favourable positions on candidate lists ([SCECLB2 - P - Electoral Reform Society Cymru](#)). Political parties may wish to consider more targeted arrangements, drawing upon the elements above and depending on their particular circumstances.

As a guide, it may be helpful for political parties to be aware that candidate lists arranged in the following vertical way (i.e. zipped list with a woman in first and alternate positions) is considered to be more likely to return a group of Members of the Senedd that is representative of the proportion of women in the general population.

Political parties should also consider whether to have horizontal criteria, in addition to vertical criteria. If all candidate lists start with a man and are zipped, for example, then unless the party wins an even number of seats (or no seats) in each constituency there will be significantly more men Members of the Senedd returned for a party than women. Therefore, the horizontal placement as explained in (iii) above can also be important in achieving a group of Members of

the Senedd that is representative of the proportion of women in the general population.

Example of a full list of 8 candidates that is zipped with a woman in first position:

- [Place 1: Woman]
- [Place 2: Man]
- [Place 3: Woman]
- [Place 4: Man]
- [Place 5: Woman]
- [Place 6: Man]
- [Place 7: Woman]
- [Place 8: Man]

Footnotes

1. Political parties may find Part 1 of the [Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance](#) for political parties on the Equality Act useful in considering what positive action they make take in their selection processes to address underrepresentation of people who share certain protected characteristics. [Back to text](#)

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