

On Balance:

Diversifying Democracy in Local Government in Wales

Report of the Expert Group on Diversity
in Local Government





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Foreword



Local government provides front-line services to the public which are vital for their everyday lives. Whether it is the schools our children attend, the social care on which our elderly relatives rely, the roads and pavements on which we drive, cycle or walk, the parks, leisure centres or libraries which we frequent, or the collection of our domestic waste and recycling, we are all dependent to a greater or lesser extent on our local councils.

This makes it vital that the people who make decisions on our behalf about all of these matters are in tune with and representative of their local communities. Unfortunately, when taken as a whole, this is clearly not the case currently for local government in Wales.

There is no County or County Borough Council in Wales in which both sexes are equally represented. More often, women make up between 20 and 30% and sometimes less. The average age of councillors in Wales is around 60 and has remained stubbornly within that range for many years. The number of non-white councillors is minuscule even in areas of Wales with relatively large numbers of BME citizens.

On top of this, we have far too many councillors elected without a contest, and more generally, the number of people who vote at local elections is disappointingly low.

This is not simply a matter of equality principles – important though that is – but the critical need for council chambers to be filled with representatives who have a range of diverse life experiences and different aspirations. That is unlikely if the profile of local government remains overly uniform.

The work of the Expert Group has run in parallel with that of the Commission on Public Service and Delivery, chaired by Sir Paul Williams (“the Williams Commission”)¹. It appears likely that its recommendations will lead to a reduction in the number of councillors and councils in Wales. If that comes to pass, it will be crucial that the proposals in this report are put into effect to ensure that improving diversity is a major factor influencing the selection of candidates to new councils.

I was very proud to be appointed as Chair of the Expert Group established by Lesley Griffiths (Minister for Local Government and Government Business) to examine the issues above. I hope that this report, and its recommendations, will serve as a springboard to bring about significant change in the types of people putting themselves forward for election at the next local elections, both at county and

¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/improvingservices/public-service-governance-and-delivery/report/?lang=en>

community level. We also need to ensure that different candidates are elected because diverse councillors will revitalise our local councils and drive their future direction as a vital tier of governance for our small nation.

L. McAllister.

Professor Laura McAllister
Chair, Expert Group on Local Government Diversity

Introduction

In May 2013 Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business, successfully moved the following motion in the Assembly:

To propose the National Assembly for Wales:

Appreciates the necessity of advocating efficient open, transparent and accountable local democracy and the importance of encouraging greater diversity and stakeholder engagement in Local Government.

Welcomes the Welsh Government's eventual commitment to facilitating live streaming during all council scrutiny and cabinet meetings.

Calls on the Welsh Government to bring forward a comprehensive agenda that will tackle issues around openness, transparency and accountability in local democracy and local government.

Calls on the Welsh Government to confirm its support for devolving responsibility for local government elections to the National Assembly.

Regrets that around 77,000 16 and 17 year olds in Wales are currently denied the vote and believes that democratic accountability would be strengthened by allowing 16 and 17 year olds to vote in elections to local councils.

During the plenary debate², the Minister said:

“When the survey results were published, I also stated that I would make a further announcement on my plans to build on the work already under way to broaden participation in democracy. Today, I am pleased to announce that I intend to establish an expert group to consider the results of the survey in detail, take evidence from interested groups, and set out a plan of action for the Welsh Government and political parties to ensure that, between now and 2017, we collectively do our best to encourage greater diversity in local government.”

² http://www.assemblywales.org/docs/rop_xml/130514_plenary_bilingual.xml#83588

Following this, the Expert Group on Diversity in Local Government was established by the Minister for Local Government and Government Business in July 2013. The Minister requested that the Expert Group review the results of the Local Government Candidates Survey (a survey of successful and unsuccessful candidates at county and community elections in 2012), consider any ways in which the survey itself and response rates might be improved and to more generally examine the profile of local government with a view to making recommendations on improving diversity in local government at the 2017 local elections.

The Expert Group's full terms of reference are at **Annex 1**. The biographies of members of the Expert Group are at **Annex 2**.

The lack of diversity in council chambers across Wales has been an issue of some concern for many years. Traditional dominance by older, white males was probably reinforced by the effect of the local government reorganisation of 1996. The merging of previous county councils with the various district, borough and city authorities in Wales brought about a competition for candidacy before the first elections to the new counties. In many cases, the existing county councillors were successful in being adopted as candidates. These tended to be older, well-established members of their political groups with strong support in their local party branches. Younger, less experienced district, borough or city councillors often lost out. It is commonly perceived that the outcome, therefore, was an older and even more male-dominated profile than previously.

There is concern about the profile of local councillors for a number of reasons. The proportion of the workforce which is female and the slowly increasing number of women achieving positions of seniority in public and private institutions is not reflected in local government in Wales. Neither, outside of some excellent examples in a few local authorities, has there been a reflection of the younger age profile of Members of the National Assembly for Wales and the UK Parliament, and Ministers in the Welsh and UK Governments.

However, perhaps most importantly, if people perceive that local government is dominated by older white males (as it is in many areas), this can serve to further alienate voters who are already difficult to enthuse as reflected in voter turnout and, indeed, all political activity.

As Williams puts it (page 174, paragraph 5.49)³:

Diversity is not simply about gender or ethnic diversity; it is about different voices, not just different characteristics of people. People in senior positions, on Boards and at the head of organisations often share many characteristics, and therefore a common way of thinking can be inherent in the system. the public service leader of the future will need to have a different range of skills from the leader of today; they will need to embrace new and innovative approaches and will need to lead on a systems basis. We believe that a lack of diversity would hinder this improvement.

Following the establishment of the National Assembly in 1999, a number of public events were arranged between Welsh Ministers and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) in the early 2000s, often aimed at under-represented groups, with the cooperation of their representative organisations. Two more organised interventions took place in the second half of the 2000s.

Step Up Cymru

Following an Assembly Member shadowing scheme managed by Operation Black Vote in 2007, the Step Up Cymru Pilot Scheme was a partnership between the National Assembly for Wales, the WLGA and the Welsh Government.

The scheme ran between October 2009 and April 2010 and provided 34 participants from across Wales with an opportunity to shadow and be mentored by a Councillor or Assembly Member over a six-month period. The aim of the Scheme was to increase participants' involvement with democratic bodies and develop their roles as active citizens and community ambassadors. Step Up Cymru was also designed to raise awareness amongst elected politicians about the barriers that people who considered themselves to be from under-represented groups might face.

³ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dpsp/publications/psgd/140120-psgd-full-report-env2.pdf>

A number of participants decided to stand for election at the 2012 local elections and the evaluation report⁴ illustrated a significantly heightened political consciousness and confidence amongst participants.

The “Expert Panel”

The Councillor Commission Expert Panel Wales was established by the Welsh Government in March 2008 to examine the recommendations of the “Councillors Commission” - in turn established by the UK Government to review participation in local government in England - and to consider more broadly the barriers to participation in local government in Wales and make recommendations to Welsh Ministers.

This was a relatively large body (13 members) including councillors, business representatives, political party officials, trade union and equalities representatives. Chaired by Sophie Howe, it published its report “Are we being served?”⁵ in November 2008.

The report contained 35 recommendations, including ones dealing with equality monitoring of councillors, publicity campaigning, training and development for councillors, political education in schools, family absence for elected members and remuneration. Not all were aimed at the Welsh Government; some were aimed at local government and were the subject of updates from the WLGA.⁶

Many of the recommendations of the Expert Panel led to the policy issues addressed through the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (“the Measure”).

⁴ http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/about_us-commission_assembly_administration/equalities/step-up-cymru.htm

⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dsjlg/consultation/090814reporten.pdf>

⁶ http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CDIQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wlga.gov.uk%2Fdownload.php%3Fid%3D3548%26l%3D1&ei=GRDVUq-NJuS57Abo_4DQAg&usg=AFQjCNGWdjVzOM_odNPgcWHqXa5DLkFVOQ

The Measure⁷

The Measure was introduced to the National Assembly in order to put into primary legislation policies which had developed from a variety of sources. Prior to 2009, these had been difficult to address because of the lack of legislative powers vested in the Assembly. Parts 1 and 2, in particular, had their roots in the report of the Expert Panel. Most of these provisions were unique to Wales:

a) Survey of candidates

The Measure introduced a requirement on “Principal Councils” (the 22 city, county and county boroughs) to conduct a survey of all elected councillors and unsuccessful candidates at both county and community council level. They were charged with collecting the returns and forwarding the data to the Welsh Government for analysis. The questions to be answered were designed to reveal candidates’ personal characteristics and employment backgrounds in order to build up a profile of those elected and those standing for election to local government. The survey is due to be repeated following each ordinary local election in order to develop longitudinal data. (see below for details of the report).

b) Remote attendance

This was designed to make it possible for councillors in employment or with caring responsibilities to attend council meetings that they would otherwise be unable to. This allowed for the first time a council meeting to take place in more than one location. This is an enabling provision, which has not yet been commenced – but is likely to be during 2014 – whereby a remotely attended meeting can only take place if the council’s standing orders allow for it. At meetings of the WLGA’s networks, it has become clear that some councils are already making preparations to push ahead with this reform, while others have been less enthusiastic (at time of writing).

⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/4/contents/enacted>

c) Annual reports

The Measure requires all Principal Councils to ensure that arrangements are in place to publish annual reports by any councillor who wishes to do so. Although not under a compulsion, indications are that most councillors will in fact do this, so as to show to their electorate the range of duties they perform and their level of involvement with local initiatives. It is a policy aimed at improving engagement and also providing interested members of the public with a better picture of what it means to be a councillor.

d) Timing of council meetings

After each ordinary local election (i.e. for the full council, not a by-election), each Principal Council is required to survey their members to assess the best times to hold council meetings. The policy was designed to make councils take account of those councillors who might have difficulty with existing timings.

e) Training and development

The Measure requires all Principal Councils to make available to their members a “reasonable” level of training and development. “Reasonable” is defined in guidance as being that required to achieve the WLGA’s Members’ Development Charter⁸. The concept of an annual personal development plan for councillors is also introduced and has been put in place by several authorities. Information from the WLGA is that at least 15 out of 28 local authorities (county councils, fire and rescue and national park authorities) carry out personal development reviews with their members.

f) Democratic Services

Each principal council is required to designate one of their officers as the Head of Democratic Services (HDS), whose job, in brief, is to ensure that adequate support is provided to councillors to perform their duties. Every council must also have a Democratic Services Committee (DSC), which carries out the designation of the HDS and, in general, reports to the council on the support provided to councillors. The DSC must be chaired by an opposition councillor.

⁸ <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/member-development-charter>

This policy was designed to provide councillors outside the leadership – the executive/cabinet – with a lever to help to ensure that the council provided acceptable levels of support for member services, as well as organising scrutiny and other committees.

g) Family absence

For the first time, councillors in Wales are entitled to maternity, paternity, and various other types of leave associated with the birth or adoption of children. Up until the Measure, the absence of a councillor was treated only in a negative fashion, i.e. if they failed to attend a meeting in six months, they were deemed to have vacated their seats. The Measure gives a clear entitlement to a councillor with a new child to take time off from council duties for up to six months. Having only been brought into effect late in 2013, it is too early to know how widely this entitlement will be taken up and any material impact it makes.

The 2012 Survey of Candidates

The survey⁹ resulted in a total of 3,201 responses (around 35%) from 21 local authorities (Anglesey's elections were postponed until 2013¹⁰). Most of the results can be seen in the table on page 15, which compares results with other surveys conducted in other parts of the UK.

The survey confirmed the severe under-representation of female councillors and candidates both at county and community level and the dominance of the over-60 age group.

It should be noted, however, that there was significant change in some councils in terms of the age and gender split. Both Monmouthshire and Powys saw their

⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/local-government-candidates-survey/?lang=en>

¹⁰ The local government elections on the Isle of Anglesey were held in May 2013. The elections were conducted on new electoral boundaries, the size of the council reduced from 40 to 30 and the pattern of electoral wards changed from single to multi member. All 30 seats were contested by 107 candidates, 19 being female. Of the 19, three were duly elected to the council. The results of the survey of candidates will be published by the Welsh Government in 2014.

average age fall. Newport had more female members than ever before, at around 40%. Swansea claimed the youngest cabinet member anywhere in the UK at 22 years of age.

There had been previous surveys of councillors (at county level only – and not including unsuccessful candidates) carried out on behalf of the Local Government Association, with separate analyses for Wales provided to the WLGA. In 1999, this showed that, in Wales, 19.5% of councillors were female. That figure rose to 21.8% after the 2004 elections¹¹. There was no Welsh disaggregation carried out after the 2008 elections but the BBC¹² carried out their own research which suggested 22% of councillors were women. So the figure of 28% in the survey results for 2012 does represent some progress¹³. That percentage will be slightly depressed by the Anglesey results, with only three women elected out of a total of 30 members, meaning an advance of, at most, some 8 percentage points in 13 years. At that rate of progress, there would be no equal representation until another 35 to 40 years have passed.

Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRP)

The IRP¹⁴ has existed since 2008 and, since the approval of the Measure, has had power to determine what members of local authorities get paid. Although it is unclear to what extent remuneration is a driver, the Panel is in a position to make use of the remuneration framework in ways which might help to reduce financial barriers for people standing for election to local government. However, current economic circumstances make it difficult for them to make major adjustments.

For several years, members of principal councils who need to care for a dependent child or adult have been eligible for a care allowance, up to a maximum of £403 per month. There is, however, anecdotal evidence, mainly from the IRP's visits to local authorities, that some potentially eligible councillors resist claiming their entitlement.

¹¹ www.wlga.gov.uk/uploads/publications/932.pdf

¹² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/7337718.stm>

¹³ The Electoral Reforms Society's figure is 26%.

¹⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/irpwsu/home/?lang=en>

There seem to be two deterrents. Firstly, other councillors may raise doubts that the allowance is really necessary, often on the grounds that they have managed to care for dependants without a specific allowance. Secondly, the publicity given to remuneration received by councillors after each municipal year acts as an incentive to minimise claims, especially in the current economic climate.

During the IRP's visits to local authorities in Wales in 2013, councillors expressed concern that these factors combined to create feelings of guilt in the minds of eligible councillors, and hence conflicted with the aim of the care allowance - to encourage those with dependents to participate in local government.

Access to elected office

The "Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund" was set up in 2012 by the UK Government's Equalities Office and runs until March 2014. The fund offers individual grants of between £250 and £20,000 to disabled people who want to be considered for selection as candidates for an election, or are already planning to stand for election.

The grants are intended to help meet the additional support needs that a disabled person may have that are associated with their disability.

The fund is available to those who are eligible to stand for office under the requirements of electoral law, can provide evidence of disability, and have had some previous involvement or interest in civic, community or other relevant activities.

In Wales, the fund covers elections to the UK Parliament and Police and Crime Commissioners. The Welsh Government is likely to consider whether to run a similar scheme in Wales following an evaluation of the UK Government's scheme.

Youth mayors and cabinets

A number of county councils have established informal youth mayors and cabinets. This forms part of an initiative, supported by the British Youth Council,¹⁵ to ensure that young people are empowered to participate in decisions which affect them. This subject was addressed with a particular degree of seriousness in the Vale of Glamorgan¹⁶.

It should be noted that some community councils have taken the opportunity to co-opt youth representatives, as enabled by the 2011 Measure. Councils could also consider whether they might participate in initiatives such as the “Youth on Boards” programme.

Youth on Boards

In the summer of 2013 a **Women Making a Difference** project selected a group of promising young people who were looking to take their volunteering to the next level to participate in a new and innovative programme. They trained over 15 young people aged between 18 and 25 in the skills and knowledge required to become Board Members or Trustees.

This project, jointly funded by GwirVol and British Council Wales was open to young people from all over Wales, and participants came from places including Swansea, Cardiff, Newport, Milford Haven, Port Talbot and the Vale of Glamorgan.

The training and experiences offered to the young people included governance training, media training, confidence building and a visit to the Senedd and Pierhead hosted by the National Assembly Outreach Team. These young people were then offered the opportunity to experience what it is like to be in public life by sitting as observers on boards and being mentored by experienced board members. There have been some promising examples with young people on the boards of the British Council in Wales and Sport Wales for example.

¹⁵ <http://www.byc.org.uk/uk-work/young-mayor-network.aspx>

¹⁶ http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our_council/council/minutes,_agendas_and_reports/reports/scrutiny_ll/2013/13-01-21/youth_cabinet_and_mayor.aspx

Evidence Gathering

Evidence from previous research

By way of context to our Expert Group review, we conducted a thorough literature search. This helped add important detail to the information gathered from our call for evidence. Allen,¹⁷ showed how women were more likely than men to drop out of local government and, indeed, to then drop out of political activity altogether. It might be assumed that this indicates a turn-off provided by the male domination of politics, the antagonistic approach, as well as the busier domestic lives often led by women. Other research seemed to suggest that the only way to break through this was to establish a critical mass of female representation, normally deemed to be over 30% of the total number, such as that, achieved in the National Assembly.

The “Welsh Power Report: Women in Public Life”¹⁸, produced by the Electoral Reform Society (ERS), is the most recent comprehensive look at the number of women in political life in Wales. Published in March 2013, it highlights the complete absence of women Police and Crime Commissioners, that only 14% of chairs of health boards are female, only 18.5% of Welsh MPs are women, only 21% of Dyfed Powys Crime Panel, Snowdonia National Park and the Mid and West Fire and Rescue Authority are female. Very similar data was included in the Equalities and Human Rights Commission’s 2012 update report “Who Runs Wales”¹⁹, indicating the scale of the challenge that still exists across most parts of civil society.

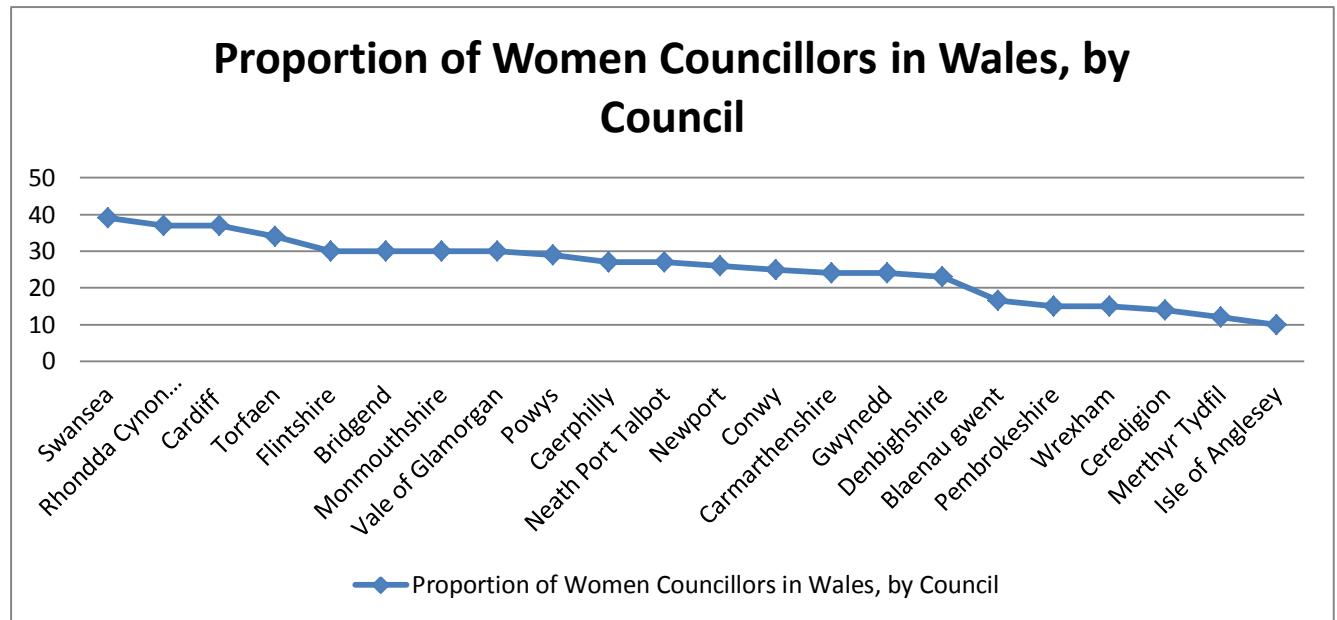
The report lists the proportion of women in each of the 22 Principal Councils. Swansea has the highest female membership of 39%. Six councils have less than 20% female membership. That even the highest figure is significantly less than 50% shows how much ground there is to be made up in Wales. At least it is no longer possible to argue that ex-industrial areas fare worst in gender equality. Although Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent still languish at under 20%, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Torfaen, Flintshire, Bridgend, Caerphilly, and Neath Port Talbot all have more than 25%, while the cities of Swansea, Cardiff and, to a lesser extent, Newport, have

¹⁷ [Allen, P. A.](#), 2013. Last in, first out – Gendered patterns of local councillor dropout. *British Politics*, 8 (2), pp. 207-224.

¹⁸ <http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/images/dynamicImages/welshpowerENG.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/wales/library/who-runs-wales-2012-update>

“relatively” healthy proportions (37.5%, 36% and 26% respectively). The evidence also shows that poor gender balances are more likely in rural authorities with a higher than average proportion of independent councillors. Anglesey, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Denbighshire, Gwynedd and Carmarthenshire all have less than a quarter female members (Wales has the highest proportion of Independent members at Principal level in the UK).



Of course, the situation is not confined to Wales. It is not simply a question of equality. Wängnerud & Sundell²⁰ found that women in elected office contribute to improving the situation for women compared to men when it comes to income levels, full-time employment in the public sector, and distribution of parental leave among parents.

At the Scottish local elections in 2012, according to Kenney and Mackay,²¹ fewer than 25% of candidates were women. The number of women elected to Scottish local councils has plateaued over the last few years at about 22%.

Figures produced by Hall, one of the members of the Expert Group, comparing relevant surveys, showed that Wales, with its estimated 28% female membership

²⁰ “Do politics matter?: Women in Swedish local elected assemblies 1970-2010 and gender equality in outcomes”

²¹ <http://genderpoliticsedinburgh.wordpress.com/2012/04/18/more-of-the-same-women-and-the-scottish-local-government-elections-2012-5-2/>

lagged behind England with 31% (rounded) and Scotland (30.4%) but was above Northern Ireland (24%). Welsh councillors are slightly older. Minority ethnic communities are severely under-represented in all the countries. There appears to be a fairly common proportion of around 15% disabled councillors, although it is unclear to what extent this is age-related.

Table of Comparative Survey Data

	Wales	England	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Gender				
Male	72%	68.5%	69.6%	76%
Female	28%	30.6%	30.4%	24%
Age				
18-29 years	2.1%	2.4%	3.2%	7%
30-39 years	4.7%	5.3%	6.7%	10%
40-49 years	11.3%	11%	16.6%	20%
50-59 years	25.4%	21.9%	28.3%	27%
60-69 years	38.8%	40.3%	38.2%	25%
70-79 years	17%	19.1%	6.7%	9%
80+ years	1%		03.%	
Ethnicity				
White	99%	96.3%	96.6%	100%
African			0.6%	
Asian			1.3%	
Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	1%	3.6%	1.6%	
Religion		NOT ASKED		
Christian	83%		49.9%	100%
Other	2%		4.3%	
None/no reply	15%		45.6%	
Sexual Orientation				NOT ASKED
Heterosexual	97%	84.2%		
Gay or lesbian	3%	3.3%		
Bisexual				
Other	<1%	0.3%		
Prefer not to say		12.2%		
Married/same sex civil partnership			72.3%	
Employment Qualifications				
None	10%	9%	5.4%	16%
'O' level GSCE/NVQ 1 /2	25%	12%	9.0%	16%
A level/ NVQ 3	10%	13.6%	12.2%	12%
NVQ4 or above	54%	55.9%	55.8%	44%
Professional qualification/other		8.3%	17.6%	11%
Employment				

Full/part time employment	31%	30.5%		60%
Unemployed & seeking work	2%	1.7%	4.5%	
Self employed	19%	14.6%		
Permanently retired	44%	47.2%	59.9%	29%
Full time education			1.1%	
Permanently sick/disabled			1.7%	
Looking after family or home	4%		5.6%	
Other		6%	27.1%	11%
Health				
Very good			46.2%	
Good	82%		42.7	
Fair	15%		9.2%	
Bad			1.9%	
poor	4%		0	
Long term illness/disability		14.1%		14%
Parental responsibility				
Child under 17	14%	12.4%	20.7%	19.0%

Highest educational qualifications of councillors, 2012

Qualification level	Community councillors	Principal councillors
NVQ 4 or Equivalent (Degree, professional qualification)	51%	54%
NVQ 3 or Equivalent (A-level)	9%	10%
NVQ 1 or 2 or Equivalent (GCSE, O-level, CSE)	25%	25%
None of the above qualifications	14%	11%

Source: Local Government Candidates Survey 2012
(Community councillors, n=2311; Principal councillors, n=449)

The Local Government Candidates' Survey covered community councils as well as the county level. Differences at the local level include a preponderance of independent members of community councils (54%) with Labour (17%) being the second largest political group. They are slightly more likely to be female, according to the results, at 32%. This may reflect the greater convenience and more limited hours of duty associated with this level of local government. Amongst party groups

on community councils, the Conservatives perform best, with 35% female membership. The age profile and ethnic make-up differs little between community and county. With only 1% of community councillors declaring themselves to be lesbian, gay or bisexual, it does appear that the county level, with 3%, is more representative of these identities. It is, however, appreciated that the self-declaration responses may have resulted in an underestimate of this characteristic.

Political parties' initiatives

Chaney, Mackay and McAllister²² showed how the number of women elected to the National Assembly from 1999 onwards had begun to change the style of and approach to politics in Wales, a dynamic referred to as the move from 'descriptive representation' to 'substantive representation'. They show how positive action in two of the main political parties had led to the improved representation of women. In 1999, Labour used a bold policy of "twinning", by which women were guaranteed candidacy in 50% of winnable seats.

In the first Assembly election, Plaid Cymru placed women at the top of regional lists for the Assembly elections, to ensure more women were elected. Both policies were controversial within the two parties but delivered material improvements in the number of women AMs elected.

To date, the other two parties have not used positive action. The Welsh Liberal Democrats have formed a Welsh Diversity Action Group, bringing together various equality groups within their party. They will study the results of the Local Government Candidates Survey as part of preparing their strategy to increase diversity at the 2017 elections.

They highlight childcare availability, the timing of meetings and the atmosphere at male-dominated council meetings as three major barriers to women's involvement. However, they are offering guidance and support to new candidates through "Inspiration Days". On top of this, they are hoping to try and identify and eliminate

²² <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/3023/>

“unconscious bias” in the selection process. They do not, however, support quotas or other forms of positive discrimination in favour of under-represented groups.

Plaid Cymru felt that the general lack of knowledge about the role of a councillor and the general attitude towards elected politicians was the biggest deterrent to engagement. They feel this is best tackled through political education for young people, as part of the curriculum. They also propose direct engagement with organisations representing disadvantaged group. Disabled people, for instance, may be put off by the costs and logistical difficulties associated with running a campaign – as well as after election.

Plaid also believes that a Proportional Represented System would provide more opportunity to favour diversity through Party lists.

Welsh Labour,in the lead up to the 2012 elections, made an explicit commitment to increase the representation of women in local government and required local parties (on a local authority basis) to draw up clear plans as to how this should be achieved.

Local plans led to significant improvement in some areas but Labour believes that to deliver a stability of representation over election cycles (which is vital to progression into senior and leadership roles) women must be represented in more than just marginal seats.

The party also stated that feedback from women members suggested that the demands of local government representation were not compatible with working and/or family commitments. They claim to have examples of well-qualified women choosing not to put themselves forward for selection due to their family commitments and their belief that the commitment of being a candidate and a councillor would not be compatible with other responsibilities

Labour felt that practical measures to support councillors with family and caring responsibilities are needed, as is a different culture and expectation that it is possible to be an effective representative and meet wider commitments. They believe that continued support and progress is needed to enable more women to take on senior roles in local government and for all parties to celebrate and laud this progress.

Labour also point to support and encouragement given to potential BME candidates and while the overall number of these is low as an overall percentage it represented a significant increase on previous levels. They say that this base of increased representation will be used to try and further increase membership from across the BME communities and to continue to increase representation in local government and in other areas of representation.

Our own evidence

The Group wrote to numerous relevant individuals and organisations in September 2013 (**see Annex 3**), informing them of the purpose of the Group and asking them to submit views on how the Candidates' Survey might be improved and how it might obtain more responses. We also asked what they saw as the main barriers to diversity in local government and what might be done in order to overcome them.

A total of 20 responses were received and the respondents are listed in **Annex 4**. In summary, the main issues raised were:

1. Improving the survey

A common response was that the Survey did not address the issue of persons who considered candidacy – or may have done – but decided against standing and that these people also merited surveying in order to identify their reasons for eventually not putting themselves forward or being selected as a candidate. The survey is primarily intended as a longitudinal exercise, comparing the cohorts at different elections, with the effectiveness of policy towards diversity being exhibited in potential changes to each cohort. However, supporting research into the factors deterring candidacy would be very useful.

In its evidence, Plaid Cymru suggested that candidates should be questioned on what encouraged them to stand. It was also proposed that benchmark data (i.e. the results of the 2012 survey) should be made available to recipients of the next survey form, in order for them to better understand the purpose of the research.

Finally, some respondents proposed broadening the research around the survey by adding telephone or face-to-face interviews. This would have the advantage of

providing qualitative data to enhance the survey, but would also add to the cost. It also does not relate to the main aim of the survey – to see change over time – which may only be fully appreciated as the surveys are repeated.

However, such an exercise could have the benefit of improving response and identifying role models, whose case studies could be published on-line as part of an exercise to attract interest from potential future candidates.

Increasing the response rate

There was a strong preference for the survey to be conducted on-line. This, combined with the issuing of the survey at the time of registering nominations, rather than post-elections, might serve to increase response rates and probably improve the quality of data because it would avoid the possibility of disinterest following the election results.

It might be necessary to amend legislation to achieve this, as the Measure specifies that the survey will take place after the elections. Distributing the survey, whether electronically or not, before the elections would mean accessing information which, strictly speaking, belongs to the Returning Officer rather than the local authority, and the Assembly currently has very limited competence in relation to the Returning Officers. However, there is time to consider how these improvements might come into effect, seeking a legislative route if required.

Engaging with local authorities or their leaders in order to encourage response might well become easier the second time around. The first survey needed to be organized very soon after the enactment of the Measure with little time to win “hearts and minds” of elected members and officers.

Finally, it was obvious from the responses in different local authorities that engaging the Local Government Data Unit to undertake the survey on their behalf had had a positive impact. Using professional researchers and statisticians has clear advantages, particularly in issuing reminders, for instance, to increase response rates.

Using the Survey

It was clear from the responses that little thought has yet been given as to how local authorities themselves might use their local results. However, there were indications that this might change in future. Now that the focus had been shifted to the non-executive councillor through the Measure, with its Democratic Services Committees, data could be useful in the preparation of Equality Plans. Flintshire Council said as much in their evidence to the Group.

The way the results of the survey have been presented might also be improved. Much of this will be achieved by having two distinct surveys – one for County candidates and one for community candidates. But this can be improved by further distinguishing between those who are elected and not elected. By doing this a longitudinal change in candidates and those who are elected could be brought out.

Where numbers of responses allow for it, the survey data could also be further drilled down. As political parties are such an important variable when it comes to participation it might be useful, for instance, to breakdown gender and BME levels by political party to see the variation which, in turn, might be used to identify good party practice, while prompting parties with poor gender/BME representation to assess their own profile and position.

2. Addressing barriers to participation

Much more valuable information was provided when respondents were asked to think about the causes of under-representation and what might be done to address the problem. Time commitment is clearly seen as a major issue, either because of domestic/caring responsibilities or employment. There is evidence from other national surveys, notably the English councillor survey of 2010, that councillors from BME backgrounds have the greatest level of caring responsibilities (30.5% of relevant respondents).

Many women do not feel it is possible to balance their responsibilities with that of councillor duties, similarly, many in work do not think they could obtain sufficient time off. Better publicity of the law in relation to employment rights, the availability of care

allowance, the need for councils to survey their members as to the best time for holding meetings and the introduction of remote attendance could all help to tackle this.

More than anything, the perceived lack of interventions by political parties to ensure a wider slate of candidates from under-represented groups, particularly women, in winnable seats, is regarded as a major barrier. On top of this, the negative portrayal of councillors – and other politicians – by the media is considered to be a major turn-off. Link this with a generally lower level of confidence and self-esteem and the shortage of role models, and it is unsurprising that there is a shortage of candidates from under-represented groups coming forward.

Finally, remuneration issues were often mentioned. On the one hand is the stigma existing in the public mind these days concerning the pay of politicians (which is considered particularly unhelpful when trying to encourage take-up of care allowance) and on the other the inadequacy of the income received by a councillor to tempt people to commit themselves to several years as a councillor at some professional and personal cost.

Good practice in addressing diversity

It was clear from the responses that many felt that political parties should make increased and more effective efforts to improve diversity by selecting candidates from under-represented groups..

Senior members of Plaid Cymru have engaged directly with members from under-represented groups to establish and operate a mentoring system. The party has also tried advertising openly for candidates, with the aim of recruiting new blood, most particularly from under-represented groups.

In the run up to the next elections, Welsh Labour intends to restate its commitment to substantially increased women's representation in local government and to introduce robust internal mechanisms and procedures to deliver it.

Some reported that the remuneration framework now in place across Wales had – despite some claims to the contrary – led to younger candidates standing because of the degree of certainty provided about their income from councillor duties over the term of the council. This needs to be coupled with the provision of full information to potential candidates as to their entitlements and what to expect from becoming a councillor, as provided in the WLGA's candidate guide.²³

The success of shadowing schemes, most notable of which has been Step Up Cymru (see above), had led to those from under-represented groups deciding to put themselves forward for – and in some cases achieving - candidacy to the council or National Assembly. Organisations like Women Making a Difference²⁴ consciously aim to try and prepare women for positions in public life and it is to be hoped that these will feed through to local government positions.

Since 2012 there has been a welcome increase in the number of women and younger councillors appointed to cabinet positions in local authorities. This helps to create more positive role models.

What might widen participation?

The final question asked consultees to put forward their ideas as to what might improve diversity. Responses included best practices such as: targeting initiatives at under-represented groups in various ways. Strongest of all, though, was the recognition that many of the answers lay in the hands of political parties, if they were prepared to commit themselves to a positive promotion of certain candidates. This is likely due to the low representation of independents in many parts of Wales, with little culture of candidates standing outside a party banner. This puts the main political parties in a pivotal position.

In particular, including several female candidates in a party list for winnable multi-member electoral wards could make a significant difference if pursued.

²³ <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/be-a-councillor-candidates-guide-welsh-local-elections-2012>

²⁴ <http://www.womenmakingadifference.org.uk/>

Themes from the Evidence

From time to time, the point is made that the sheer weight of male councillors in local government can be off-putting for women. More diverse representation might lead to more effective decision-making affecting local communities.

In many ways, the political structures introduced through the Local Government Act 2000, replacing the committee system with the cabinet process, laid stress on roles which might come more comfortably to female politicians. The removal of the decision-making powers, to a large extent, from full council and large committees (by placing them with the cabinet) should serve to diminish the opportunity for adversarial politics. The increased stress on the questioning role of scrutiny, often requiring cross-party cooperation, together with the emphasis on councillors' ward work as "community champions" should make life less fulfilling for the traditional councillor who enjoyed the "rough and tumble" of the council chamber. It is more common to hear complaints at the ineffectiveness of scrutiny from councillors who enjoyed the committee system in the past.

The IRP visited all 22 Principal Councils (as well as national parks and fire and rescue authorities) in their 2013 roadshow. They have pointed out that there were only two female leaders of councils and 4 female deputies. 34 female councillors held cabinet posts but in four authorities there were none.

What the Panel did note was the increased number of younger candidates in some authorities. Swansea had the youngest cabinet member in the UK and Ceredigion had a council chair still in his twenties. Swansea's leader had allowed councillors (from the majority group) to apply for leadership positions, with CVs and interviews as in a normal application process and this had worked in favour of some younger and female candidates: promotion on merit, rather than "the old boy's network".

The more councils are able to put councillors from under-represented groups in positions where they can become role models – and the more they are used for interface with the public, the more likely it is for new entrants to follow in their footsteps. The following examples from two members from Neath Port Talbot Council show what might be achieved.

SUZANNE PADDISON

My road to election started with my membership of a political party. I became active within my constituency, helping out with campaigns for AM's, the MP, the referendum on The Welsh Assembly, and the Police and Crime Commissioner Election. I did these over a period of several years. During this time I was asked if I would like to become a school governor. I was recommended as a suitable person by a Councillor and was appointed to a local primary school. After two years the Chair of Governors resigned and I was approached by the Head teacher to ask whether I would consider standing. This I did and was subsequently elected. I held office as the Chair until the School closed as part of the Local Authority's Strategic School Improvement plan. This was a very interesting and rewarding experience and helped me when I sought selection to become a candidate in the local elections. Many people in the locality already knew me through my school connection.

I had not intended to seek elected office. The local A.M just asked me whilst out delivering leaflets one day if I had ever considered becoming a local Councillor. The seed of the idea had been planted and I reflected on it for some time, until approximately 12 months before the next local government elections were due, I answered a general email that was asking for people interested in standing to attend a fact finding evening. I attended and felt that it was for me. I sought selection, was successful and finally was elected in May 2012. I didn't find being a female candidate put me at a disadvantage in any way. Whilst campaigning, I found the public to be completely open to the idea of female Councillors. I would suggest to any woman thinking of engaging in any form of public life not to be persuaded by fear of the unknown but to 'go for it'.

If I had to give a suggestion as to how society could engage more women to seek elected positions I would say – more women who have already achieved positions need to just ask them if they would be interested. In my case, that was all the encouragement I needed. It seems simplistic but it is easily done. I will do my best to suggest this to any woman I come across.

I recently made a much bigger decision, to stand as a parliamentary candidate after the sitting MP announced he would not be seeking reselection. This was a much harder decision. In this regard I feel that being a woman does make a difference to people. I have been very active within my party since becoming a councillor, I am the constituency campaigns coordinator, but live in an area that is a so called 'safe seat'. Because of this fact many men from outside the constituency are also interested. I do feel that the 'old boy's network' comes into play when fighting for parliamentary seats, more than the local elections. Notwithstanding this I intend to give it my best shot and see what happens. I have had to take a long look at myself and try to convince myself that I am as good a candidate as the men.

Only time will tell if I will be successful at this.

I hope my story, although at this time, unfinished, will inspire another woman somewhere to take that first step forward and – Just go for it.

KAREN ELIZABETH PEARSON

Having worked for many years out of the Glyn Dulais Care Home, in Crynant, as a relief manager with Local Government, I began to develop strong links within the community. At the same time I was the treasurer of Crynant Cubs and Scouts for several years which also gave me an insight into the difficulties faced by many rural families juggling daily life with

work, particularly women, who would often provide me, and each other, with support, and encouragement as well as inspiration.

I decided to run as a County Councillor because like many other families, I have encountered numerous barriers in life, particularly those faced by women, trying to raise a family and develop a career, primarily for financial purposes, which I believe government, especially local government can help with. I also believe that I have the compassion as well as the life skills, necessary to represent the diverse mix of individuals, (even within a small community such as Crynant) and the difficulties they encounter. Although Crynant is seen as a fairly affluent area, many individuals are faced by the day to day influence local government has over their lives, in areas such as social welfare; health as well as education.

A trade unionist since leaving school, with family members actively involved within local politics, I was encouraged to run for County Councillor at Neath Port Talbot, representing the Crynant Ward, which I have for the last 18 months. This situation has in part been helped by my employer, Barnardo's, who have allowed me to continue working, flexibly around their needs. This is a clear sign of the times as employers realise that some of their best employees are women who need to fit their work pattern around their family lives, quite a common practice within the third sector, and one that I believe the private and public sector are moving towards.

There are many barriers faced by rural women, particularly within politics, as this has been the Bastille of men for many years and as a result women are not always taken seriously or given the opportunities afforded to men. However, I can say that my Ward (as have the Labour County Party), has been overwhelmingly supportive and encouraging and without that assistance I would probably not be in politics today.

Although I believe I have made an impact on a local level, considering the short time I have represented the community, I feel I have a lot more to offer at a Regional or National level and hope, like many other women, that I get the opportunity to use my extensive experience and skills to help those that need it most.

Barriers to overcome

The greatest barrier is undoubtedly the general reduction in, and alienation from, political activity. Active membership of the mainstream parties is at an all-time low and this has a number of impacts. If insufficient young people are joining, that means that the membership will age. Lower membership also means a smaller pool to choose candidates from. A low active membership means that meetings will be small, that organizing roles will fall on a small number of people, who may become tired or disillusioned. It also means that fewer young people are growing up in politically active families.

The remuneration available for councillors is something of a curate's egg. The basic salary of £13,175 is relatively low if looked upon as a sole source of income. It is,

however, a reasonable compensation if a councillor's fundamental role is seen (as it is by the IRP), as part-time and the pay might therefore be attractive for a candidate who has alternative income of some kind. However, it is not sufficient to attract people to give up employment, arguably not sufficient to compensate for an impact on their career progression in their main career and not sufficiently above benefits level for someone in receipt of benefits to become totally reliant on the basic salary. In some cases, councillors in receipt of a senior salary may be earning as much through work as a councillor as they were – or would have done – in work. In some cases, as in the case of a leader in a large or medium-sized council, it may be higher than they may have – or been likely to have – received in outside employment. This is reflective of the responsibilities held by councillors in leadership positions. That said, such salaries are not secure, and leaders and cabinet members can be removed from post 'overnight' losing most if not all of their council salary without the protection afforded to other full time politicians (such as AMs or MPs) or indeed redundancy as provided to employees.

With the Williams report pointing towards a reduction in the number of councillors, the IRP may well need to reevaluate the allowances available to councillors.

Some female councillors have, however, expressed the view that the remuneration is an attractive recompense if they can fit councillor duties around their other employment and/or domestic responsibilities.

Remuneration available to councillors includes care allowance of up to £403 per month. This can be of considerable help to members who need to pay for childcare. Unfortunately, as reported by the IRP, claiming it – which is then recorded and publicised as all councillors' remuneration is required to be – can act as a deterrent in itself. There have been well-publicised cases of councillors being accused of abusing the allowance. The allowance by itself does not mean that appropriate childcare facilities are available, of course.

Care allowance is not only claimable by female councillors, of course, and a number of male councillors have indeed claimed it since it was introduced in 2002. There should be no suggestion that this facility, together with the new family absence arrangements, is intended to pigeonhole women as carers. A genuine improvement

in female representation within council chambers is just as likely to include women without dependents, or those whose previous dependents are now adult.

In Scotland, there is no care allowance as such but councillors may opt for a “salary sacrifice” scheme, through which they give up part of their remuneration in exchange for childcare vouchers.

Aspects of the experience of being a councillor can also be off-putting. Many councillors “boast” of being available 24/7 to their electors, called out at all times of day or night. While that might be true – and it may be difficult for a councillor to put off a troubled constituent – the intensity implied is not an encouragement for new people to get involved.

Despite the often self-sacrificing nature of many councillors, it is rare for the media to praise them but all too common for any weakness to be highlighted and condemned.

Successful initiatives

Most councils have appointed a “Members Development Champion” from within the ranks of their councillors. In some cases, these have the role of encouraging new recruits on the council, in a mentoring role. In some councils, their role is more sophisticated. Swansea, for instance, has a range of member champions with the aim of providing a link between the council and particular under-represented groups.²⁵

The Association of London Councils, in advance of their elections in 2010, produced a leaflet “People like You Stand for Election”. This was aimed particularly at minority ethnic groups but more generally at encouraging diversity in the council chamber. This sort of campaign could be repeated in any area.

Since the approval of the Measure, community councils have been able to co-opt young persons in a non-voting capacity to serve as speaking observers on the council. There is nothing to prevent a county council doing the same.

²⁵ <http://www.swansea.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=52702>

Council leaders who have appointed women or young members into their cabinets have created potential role models. While clearly only able to appoint on merit, identifying merit can be approached in different ways. Again in Swansea, the practice employed by the leader following the 2012 elections was to allow any member of the controlling political group to apply for cabinet posts and participate in an interview with the leader and deputy. Adopting this approach, rather than traditional patronage, led to a council leadership including four women and two younger men.

The WLGA produced a booklet at the 2012 elections entitled “Be A Councillor”²⁶ which answered many of the questions which potential councillors might ask about their future role. It was available online during political party conferences and other events and distributed to candidates standing for election to county councils.

The “Be A Councillor” campaign was also run by the Local Government Association in London councils. Steve Reed is MP for Croydon North and said: *“I agree that we need a much more diverse and representative group of councillors representing our communities. We need more women, more young people and more people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. During my time as leader of the opposition in Lambeth, up until 2006, we ran a three-year programme that identified people from precisely those groups, offering them shadowing, mentoring and training, and supporting them to stand as councillors. We were delighted in 2006 when that bore fruit, with the biggest increase in BME representation anywhere in the country that year. That model has been used by all parties in other places but, sadly, it is not yet used everywhere. I commend the LGA for its work, through the Be a Councillor campaign, to extend such models”*.

Clearly, much can be achieved by way of improving the image of local government if councillors see themselves as emissaries into their local community and encourage people to consider following them into local government. In 2007, Blaenau Gwent council ran an event entitled “I’m a Councillor, Get me Out of Here!”

²⁶ <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/be-a-councillor-candidates-guide-welsh-local-elections-2012>

Blaenau Gwent Case Study

Councillor Des Hillman, then leader of Blaenau Gwent Council said: “I’m a Councillor helps to promote local democracy and aims to get young people to ask questions and get excited by politics – after all they are the next generation of voters.”

In 2007 Councillors Gillian Clark, Jennifer Morgan, Haydn Trollope, Stephen Thomas and Hedley McCarthy took part in the contest. The councillors have put a personal manifesto and answered questions on the website www.bigvote.org.uk.

Over 200 young people registered to take part in the ‘I’m a Councillor Get Me Out of Here’ democracy challenge. They asked 463 questions and voted for their choice from among the five councillors to become Blaenau Gwent Youth Champion for 2007. The Blaenau Gwent section of the www.bigvote.org.uk ‘I’m a Councillor Get Me Out of Here’ challenge, supported by the National Democracy Campaign, was the third busiest in the UK.

Councillor Clark, Executive Member for Education and the Blaenau Gwent Youth Champion in 2007 said: “Young people in Blaenau Gwent are the next generation of voters – it is vital that they are engaged in the democratic and political process and take an interest in local affairs. By showing that we listen to them and take them seriously, we can ensure that they will take part in local democracy in the future.”

Since 2012, the Assembly’s Presiding Officer, Dame Rosemary Butler AM has hosted a series of seminars around the theme of Women in Public Life, in which panels of influential women from different sectors were engaged in discussions looking at the barriers to women’s participation in public life.

She has also launched a web portal²⁷ containing details of public appointments in Wales as well as opportunities for appropriate training; and intends to launch a mentoring scheme aimed at women to provide personal development and skills training and role shadowing opportunities.

²⁷ http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/about_us-commission_assembly_administration/abt-presiding-officer/wipl-home/wipl-portal.htm

Conclusions

The candidates' survey

The response rate to the survey undoubtedly suffered from being the first occasion that the Welsh Government, rather than local government's own organisations, had conducted the survey. There were some responses from councillors to Welsh Government suspicious as to the purposes of the survey and at what they considered the intrusiveness of some of the questions. It might be possible to overcome much of the hostility and caution next time the survey takes place (at the time of the next ordinary local elections) by working more closely with local government to explain the benefits of the survey for measuring the success of measures designed to improve diversity.

The response rate might also be boosted by some organisational changes. The initial exercise was a paper exercise from the point of view of the recipients (although the transfer of data between local authorities and Welsh Government was electronic). More and more people are becoming familiar with on-line supply of data and inclusion of a link to an electronic version of the form, or direct e-mail supply where the contact details of recipients were known, would be easier for many.

Even if they are conducted at the same time – which is sensible given that all local elections in Wales normally take place on the same day – it has been suggested that the county level survey and the community level survey should be seen as distinct and analysed accordingly. This should be achievable through administrative methods but could lend itself to a more “personalised” approach, with the covering letter more appropriate to each particular audience.

The first survey was run after the elections had taken place. This was in keeping with the wording of the Measure which introduced the survey. However, it probably led to a high rate of non-response from unsuccessful candidates. It has been suggested that a better response would be generated if forms were distributed at the time of nomination for candidacy. There would need to be some form of identifier which could be used to identify who did subsequently get elected, but this must not be allowed to interfere with the anonymity of the responses otherwise.

A potential difficulty with this approach is that the nomination process can be considered to be the territory of the Returning Officer, not the local authority, and the Assembly has limited legislative competence in relation to the conduct of elections. However, there is time available to try and find a legal or organisational route to achieve this.

It was notable also that response rates were generally better where local authorities had agreed for the Local Government Data Unit to handle the survey on their behalf. There appears to be considerable merit in the idea of using the Data Unit – or another appropriate research body – to conduct the survey across Wales.

In addition, a view was expressed that an attempt should be made to reconsider the survey questions with a view to achieving greater comparability of results with the other councillor surveys conducted in the UK.

It was also suggested that the survey might be enhanced through involving those who considered standing for election but decided against it, in order to assess what deterred potential candidates. There was an additional proposal that the survey should be supported by some in-depth interviews. Neither of these could be built into the survey as provided for in the Measure. It would require a connected but separate qualitative project to be carried out shortly after the survey and would require cooperation from political parties to identify possible interviewees. It would be for the appropriate Minister to decide nearer the time whether this was worthwhile pursuing.

Local authorities have access to the data for their own area. This could be used now, together with other data, by Democratic Services Committees and Equalities Champions within authorities to develop strategies to address diversity issues. A local authority could use the information to help them to target initiatives aimed at encouraging candidacy amongst under-represented groups.

Local authorities could also provide valuable information – to themselves and the political community more generally – if they were to conduct exit interviews with elected members who had decided not to stand for re-election. The WLGA would be well placed to collect this data from local authorities, suitably anonymised, in order to see whether there are any common characteristics of those standing down.

Improving diversity and representativeness

To a greater extent than any other factor, the under-representation of women in political life generally, and local government in particular, has been highlighted as the biggest issue confronting those seeking a council chamber which reflects its electorate. It has long been the case in many parts of the workforce, particularly the public sector, that women make up a majority of employees. Increasingly, women are reaching managerial, including senior managerial positions. And yet, with the singular exception of the National Assembly, there has been nothing like a representative share of elected seats being filled by women.

30% is the target adopted for female representation for women in decision-making positions across the Commonwealth (see below). That is despite the fact that many Commonwealth countries have cultures in which it is very difficult for women to advance as they have in more developed economies, for which 30% is a very ambitious figure. It is not acceptable for a country with long-standing equalities standards and where there should be no barriers to female participation.

The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015²⁸

Democracy is a fundamental value of the Commonwealth. Women's full participation in democracy and in peace processes is crucial for the achievement of sustainable development. A target of no less than 30 per cent of women in decision-making in the political, public and private sectors by 2005 was recommended by the Fifth Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs (5WAMM) in 1996 and endorsed by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Edinburgh in 1997. (page 10)

Governments are encouraged to take action to: (page 29/30)

- i. Increase women's representation to a minimum of 30 per cent in decision-making in parliament and local government by creating an enabling environment for women (including young women) to seek and advance political careers and by other measures such as encouraging political parties to adopt a 30 per cent target for women candidates as part of their manifestos and to provide leadership training for women. Governments who have already achieved 30 per cent should strive for much higher aspirations.
- ii. Review the criteria and processes for appointment to decision-making bodies in the public and private sectors to encourage increased women's participation and representation. This will require explicit investment into institutional capacity.
- iii. Promote standards in the media whereby discriminatory and/or derogatory images and remarks about women are eliminated.

²⁸ <http://secretariat.thecommonwealth.org/files/212371/FileName/GenderPOA2005-2015.pdf>

The Welsh Government has a commitment to seek to introduce a 40% quota for women on public sector boards, inspired by Norway, which has the same quota for company boards.

In addition, the Davies Report on Women on Boards²⁹ made the following recommendation: *All Chairmen of FTSE 350 companies should set out the percentage of women they aim to have on their boards in 2013 and 2015. FTSE 100 boards should aim for a minimum of 25% female representation by 2015 and we expect that many will achieve a higher figure. Chairmen should announce their aspirational goals within the next six months (by September 2011). Also we expect all Chief Executives to review the percentage of women they aim to have on their Executive Committees in 2013 and 2015.*

There is worrying research suggesting that women are more likely than men to drop out of politics permanently if they lose their seats or decide not to stand again. This could suggest that they are put off by a male dominated organisation, with its associated adversarial style of debate. Again, exit interviews conducted by local authorities might help to clarify this.

Once a critical mass of female membership is achieved, though, (and the Assembly is probably the best example of this) the effect can be to alter the nature of debate and discussion towards a more cooperative, reasoned approach. It is highly unlikely, though, that this can be achieved by chance, at least not in the short to medium term. Although Wales has a traditionally high number of Independent councillors, at county level at least the overwhelming majority of elected members represent political parties. Some form of positive action, particularly by political parties is probably required. However it is done, it means female candidates standing for election in what could be termed “winnable” seats. Political parties would benefit from looking at local successes in improving diversity and seeing what lessons might benefit from general application.

There are, of course, other problems with the profile of councillors in Wales. The average age, at approximately 60, is too high. There are insufficient numbers in employment. There are very few young people (under 30 years old) in council

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/women-on-boards-review>

chambers. Although the percentage of disabled councillors might appear to be above average, that is most probably mainly a factor of age. Finally, even though Wales does not, on the whole, have a high density of black or minority ethnic people (4.4% of the population as recorded in the 2011 census), their representation in the city areas is too low and there are only a tiny handful of female BME councillors.

Stonewall Cymru has also expressed the view that the existing age and gender profile of much of local government in Wales creates an environment which is unlikely to attract candidates who are lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) who might otherwise be interested in local politics. Traditional attitudes might also discourage any existing LGB councillors from declaring their orientation.

Although the political parties promote the vast majority of candidates, a wider campaign along the lines of Step-Up Cymru may be required, prior to the next elections, to try and engage with under-represented networks, linking them with councillors to shadow, and hopefully raising their awareness of the possibilities.

Promotion of political education in schools – with visits and talk by councillors – could help to reach young people getting ready to vote and taking an interest in politics more generally.

Member champions – councillors with a particular role to encourage the training and development of councillors – could use their positions as evangelists for local government by trying to identify potential future councillors. Indeed, this role should be adopted by all councillors.

Leaders of councils and political groups on councils can play a vital role by seeking to assist younger – and female – members to advance within their council. For example, including them within the council cabinet, if they have the ability, putting them in deputy cabinet positions as a development role, or to chair or deputy chair positions on council committees, can serve to ready them for leadership positions in the future.

There is considerable ignorance concerning the role of councillors, whether at county or community level. These can vary from a belief that councillors are “in it for

themselves” or, getting paid for doing very little, on the one hand, to a belief that they are constantly on-call 24/7, with no “downtime” for themselves (a belief often fostered by councillors themselves), on the other.

There is certainly need for factual information about the role of councillors, the time commitment likely to be involved, the duties they are expected to fulfil, the remuneration available – including care allowance – and the tax and benefits implications. This should also cover the legal entitlement to time off work, the new family absence entitlements, the possibilities of remote attendance at meetings and the flexibility councils have around the timing of meetings.

Publications like “People Like You” and the recent campaign led by the Presiding Officer and Chwarae Teg, together with Women Making a Difference need to form part of a campaign.

Local government needs to form or use existing links with community organisations to try and encourage their members to consider local government. This could include school governors, residents and tenants associations, sports organisations, those acting for under-represented groups and many others.

Employers could be encouraged to realize the potential benefits to their organisations of having elected councillors within the workforce. As well as contributing to that company’s corporate and social responsibility by helping their local communities, the broader training and development undergone by councillors can be made use of when transferred back to their workplace. Allowing a career break to someone in a senior position in the local council could have significant payback in terms of their personal development during that period.

It is interesting to note that, in its report “Councillors in the Frontline³⁰, the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee said: “*The Ministry of Defence is giving serious consideration to the ways in which employers can be encouraged to support military reservists. The Department for Communities and Local Government should conduct a similar review. We recommend that the Government consult on how employers can be encouraged to provide support to*

³⁰ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmcomloc/432/43202.htm>

their staff who serve as councillors. Options that might be considered include a kitemark-style recognition scheme and the introduction of a financial incentive scheme”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving response to the survey

- 1. The Welsh Government should work together with local government, particularly through the WLGA and One Voice Wales (OVW), to explain the purpose of the survey and its importance in measuring changes in the diversity of those seeking election and those succeeding in doing so. This should include a highlight report from the first survey so that recipients of the questionnaire can better appreciate its purpose.*
- 2. The Welsh Government should ensure that the next survey questionnaire can be completed and returned on-line.*
- 3. The surveys of candidates at county and community levels should be separated and conducted as two distinct surveys.*
- 4. The Welsh Government should establish a methodology which allows the survey questionnaires to be distributed at the time of handling nomination papers, in advance of the elections.*
- 5. The Welsh Government should agree with local government that a single research provider, such as the Local Government Data Unit, be employed to conduct the survey on behalf of local authorities at the next elections.*

Improving the information from the Survey

- 6. The Welsh Government should compare the question list with those used for surveys of councillors in other parts of the UK and should, as part of a general review of the questions, decide whether to add or amend any to bring about better comparability and consult on those proposals.*
- 7. The Welsh Government should commission research to enhance the next survey aimed at obtaining qualitative data from a sample of respondents as well as interviewing a sample of potential candidates who had subsequently decided not to stand.*
- 8. Local authorities should be required to examine the data for their own area and develop strategies aimed at improving diversity at future*

election, the success of which can be measured through the subsequent candidates' survey.

9. *Local authorities should be obliged to conduct exit interviews with councillors standing down at an election, to assess the reasons for them doing so. The WLGA/Local Government Data Unit should collect anonymised data from the local authorities and publish a report after each normal election.*

Action for political parties

10. *Political parties (and local government itself) should make use of mentoring schemes, involving successful female councillors and those elected at other levels, by encouraging them to act as mentors for other potential candidates, engaging with appropriate local networks.*
11. *Each of the main political parties should be encouraged to develop their own strategies which will result in female members being nominated as candidates in at least 40% of those seats at the next local elections considered winnable by the party concerned. This will be of crucial importance in the light of the Williams review and the likelihood of fewer councillors.*
12. *Leaders of all of the main political parties should make a public commitment in support of a charter for local government diversity, based on these recommendations, including the 40% target.*

Widening participation in local government

13. *The Welsh Government should collaborate with the WLGA and equalities groups to establish a shadowing/mentoring scheme in the period two years prior to the next local elections. This could be widened to include town and community councils, in cooperation with One Voice Wales.*
14. *Local authorities should encourage secondary schools, as part of the "Active Citizenship" goal in the Personal and Social Education Framework, to arrange for local councillors to speak to school students*

about their role. Councillors from under-represented groups should be encouraged to participate in this.

- 15. Community councils should take advantage of the provisions in the Measure to co-opt youth “councillors” in a non-voting role and county councils should consider the merits of adopting similar procedures, including the creation of “shadow” Youth Cabinets. There should be a campaign involving One Voice Wales and other interested parties to promote town and community councils to increase public awareness of their role and as a potential entry road into political life for under-represented groups.*
- 16. Welsh Government should consider the evaluation of the Access to Elected Office project operated in English elections and consider operating a similar scheme for the next local elections.*
- 17. “Member Champions” in each council should be encouraged to play an external role in encouraging greater participation in local government.*
- 18. Every councillor not intending to seek re-election at the following elections should be encouraged to mentor a potential successor candidate for their seat. Democratic Services Committees could oversee this work.*
- 19. The Welsh Government should coordinate a campaign, together with local government and relevant equalities and civic partners, to ensure that national and local promotions take place in the 18 months leading up to the next local elections to ensure that appropriate information is received by the public about local government and that the idea of becoming active in local government is carried into the community. Local and national media should be included within the campaign, in an attempt to combat the negative image of councillors often portrayed in media.*
- 20. In the period between now and the pre-election period described above, a lower level on-going campaign, involving appropriate stakeholders, should be undertaken to ensure that the need to improve diversity in local government remains in the public eye and to maintain contact with networks of under-represented groups. This should include publicity for role models, targeted to reach appropriate audiences.*

- 21. This campaign should also include approaches to employers to facilitate council membership by their employees. Public sector employers, including the Welsh Government, should become exemplars in facilitating their employees becoming and serving as councillors.*
- 22. Private sector organisations, particularly those benefitting from Welsh Government procurement, should be encouraged to support staff wishing to serve as councillors, as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility programmes. The CBI and other employer organisations should be asked to support this aim.*
- 23. Local authorities which do not already broadcast their meetings should commence doing so at the earliest opportunity, as well as making full use of other social media outlets to engage with a wider public.*
- 24. Welsh Government should evaluate the effectiveness of reforms introduced through the Measure to see how effective they have been in achieving the aims of the Expert Panel.*

ACTION PLAN AND TIMETABLE

Recommendation	Timing	Cost
<u>Improving response to the survey</u>		
1. The Welsh Government, local government, the WLGA and One Voice Wales to explain the purpose of the survey and its importance. This should include a highlight report from the first survey so that recipients of the questionnaire can better appreciate its purpose.	Material to be produced in time for distribution with the survey for candidates at the 2017 elections.	Administrative, distribution and authorship costs, likely to be contained within existing budgets.
2. The Welsh Government should ensure that the next survey questionnaire can be completed and returned on-line.	Design and administrative work will need to be completed before 2017 elections.	Minimal costs to be borne within agreed budgets
3. The surveys of candidates at county and community levels should be separated and conducted as two distinct surveys.	As above	As above
4. The Welsh Government should establish a methodology which allows the survey questionnaires to be distributed at the time of handling nomination papers.	Will need to be addressed during 2015/16 to give time for agreement with electoral administrators and possibly amend Measure provisions.	If Measure requires amendment, cost will be borne within existing budgets

5. The Welsh Government should agree with local government that a single research provider be employed to conduct the survey on behalf of local authorities at the next elections.	To be agreed at least one year before the next elections.	No additional cost. Welsh Government already committed to meet costs of survey.
<u>Improving the information from the Survey</u>		
6. The Welsh Government should compare the question list with those used for surveys of councillors in other parts of the UK and should amend to bring about better comparability.	To be completed in 2015 in case of need to amend Measure.	Contained within existing budgets.
7. The Welsh Government should commission research to enhance the next survey aimed at obtaining qualitative data from a sample of respondents as well as interviewing a sample of potential candidates who had subsequently decided not to stand.	Decision required by May 2016 in order for procurement exercise to take place.	c£10-15,000
8. Local authorities should be required to examine the data for their own area and develop strategies aimed at improving diversity at future elections.	Can proceed immediately and again after each elections.	Would need to be contained within existing budgets.
9. Local authorities should conduct exit interviews with	To be conducted in 2016/17 once decisions on	No additional costs to

councillors standing down at an election, to assess the reasons for doing so. The WLGA should collect anonymised data and publish a report after each normal election.	candidacy had been made. Report produced in 2017.	existing budgets.
<u>Action for political parties</u>		
10. Political parties and local government itself should encourage successful female councillors to act as mentors, engaging with appropriate local networks.	Can be implemented immediately.	To be borne within existing budgets.
11. Each of the major political parties should be encouraged to develop strategies which will result at the next local elections in female members being nominated as candidates in at least 40% of those seats considered winnable by the party concerned.	To be implemented in good time for the commencement of candidate selection for 2017.	No obvious additional cost.
12. Leaders of the main political parties should make a public commitment in favour of this target.	To be considered within their responses to the Report.	No cost.
<u>Widening participation in local government</u>		
13. The Welsh Government should collaborate with the WLGA, equalities groups and, if appropriate, the	Programme would operate in 2015 and 2016. Preparatory work required in second half of	Cost of project coordinator,

<p>Assembly's Presiding Officer, to establish a shadowing/mentoring scheme in the period two years prior to the next local elections. This could be widened to include town and community councils, in cooperation with One Voice Wales.</p>	<p>2014.</p>	<p>administrative costs and expenses. c£30,000 per year for 2.5 years. Sharing of costs possible between participating bodies.</p>
<p>14. Local authorities should encourage secondary schools, as part of the "Active Citizenship" goal in the Personal and Social Education Framework, to arrange for local councillors to speak to school students about their role. Councillors from under-represented groups should be encouraged to participate in this.</p>	<p>To be agreed at each local authority area but can proceed as soon as possible.</p>	<p>To be met within existing budgets.</p>
<p>15. Community councils should take advantage of the provisions in the Measure to co-opt youth "councillors" in a non-voting role and county councils should consider the merits of adopting similar procedures, including the creation of "shadow" Youth Cabinets. There should be a campaign involving One Voice Wales and other interested parties to promote town and community councils to increase public</p>	<p>Should be ongoing campaign following publication of Report.</p>	<p>To be agreed in funding negotiations between OVW and Welsh Government.</p>

awareness of their role and as a potential entry road into political life for under-represented groups.		
16. Welsh Government should consider the evaluation of the Access to Elected Office project operated in English elections and consider operating a similar scheme for the next local elections.	To follow publication of evaluation by UK Government Equalities Office. Scheme would need to be put in place at least a year before elections.	Demand driven but likely to require reserve of c£10,000.
17. "Member Champions" in each council should be encouraged to play an external role in encouraging greater participation in local government.	For each local authority to pursue following publication of report.	To be borne within existing budgets.
18. Every councillor should be encouraged to mentor a potential successor candidate for their seat.	As above	As above
19. Publicity and educational campaign, involving Welsh Government, local government and relevant equalities and civic partners, to ensure that information is received by the public about local government and that the idea of becoming active in local government is carried into the community	Campaign to focus on 2015/16, in order to arouse interest for 2017 elections.	Expertise to be procured by Welsh Government through inward secondment or fixed term contract .with potential cost of £30,000. Publicity costs

		to be agreed with WLGA and others but likely to be c£40k.
20. On-going campaign, linked to 18 above, to ensure that the need to improve diversity in local government remains in the public eye and to maintain contact with networks of under-represented groups. This should include publicity for role models, targeted to reach appropriate audiences.	To commence in second half 2014 and be ongoing.	Project coordination and administrative costs to be linked with 13 and 18 above. Steering group to be established to oversee work.
21. This campaign should also include approaches to employers to facilitate council membership by their employees. Public sector employers, including the Welsh Government, should become exemplars in facilitating their employees becoming and serving as councillors.	Ongoing campaign to commence in second half of 2014.	As above.
22. Private sector organisations, particularly those benefitting from Welsh Government procurement, should be encouraged to support staff wishing to serve as councillors, as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility programmes. The CBI should be	As above.	As above.

asked to support this aim.		
23. Local authorities which do not already broadcast their meetings should commence doing so, as well as making full use of other social media outlets to engage with a wider public.	For each local authority to consider following publication of Report.	To be borne within existing budgets. (Welsh Government has already provided start-up funding for this).
24. Welsh Government should evaluate the effectiveness of reforms introduced through the Measure to see how effective they have been in achieving the aims of the Expert Panel.	Evaluation of Measure to be conducted during 2014/15.	c£25,000

ANNEX 1

Expert Group Terms of reference

- a) To consider and analyse the results of the Local Government Candidates Survey 2012 carried out under the provisions of Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.
- b) To identify any improvements to the methodology and content of the survey which could be addressed prior to the next local elections in 2017.
- c) To examine the implications of the survey results as regards the profile of Local Government in Wales.
- d) To take evidence from interested persons and organisations in relation to the survey results and Local Government diversity more generally.
- e) To develop an action plan for the Welsh Government, Local Government, political groups and other stakeholders which can help to design policy aimed at increased diversity and therefore improving the profile of elected members following the 2017 Local elections.

ANNEX 2

Biographies



Professor Laura McAllister is the Professor of Governance at the University of Liverpool's School of Management and Chair of Sport Wales. She was educated at Bryntirion Comprehensive School, Bridgend and is a graduate of the London School of Economics and Cardiff University where she completed a PhD in politics. Laura was a member of the Richard Commission on the Powers and Electoral Arrangements for the National Assembly which reported in March 2004 and she provided research advice to the Independent Panel on AMs' Pay and Support in 2008-09. She is Honorary Visiting Professor at Cardiff University, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia and the China National School of Administration, Beijing.

A former Wales football international and national team captain with 24 caps, Laura is currently Chair of Sport Wales. Laura is a Board Member of UK Sport and the Welsh Football Trust. She is a Trustee of Stonewall UK and the Institute of Welsh Affairs, as well as a member of the Wales Advisory Committee of the British Council. Laura holds honorary degrees from the Universities of Bangor, Cardiff and Glamorgan (South Wales).



Joy Kent has been the chief executive of Chwarae Teg since January 2013. Before joining the organisation she was the founding director of Cymorth Cymru, an umbrella body for organisations working with vulnerable people and prior to that held policy roles at the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru, the Welsh Local Government Association and Welsh Government.

Joy is also a trustee of the WCVA and a director of WCVA Services. Before settling in Wales, Joy taught at and managed private language schools in Spain, the Czech Republic, Brazil and Egypt.



Dr Declan Hall was until recently a lecturer in Local Government and Politics at the Institute of Local Government at the University of Birmingham and from 2008-12 a member of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales. Dr Hall also has close involvement with councillor remuneration schemes in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. He is now an independent consultant on local government issues.



Naomi Alleyne is the Director of Social Services and Housing within the Welsh Local Government Association, having previously held the post of Director for Equalities and Social Justice. Prior to that, she was employed in the Equalities Unit at the then Welsh Assembly Government working on race equality and asylum and immigration issues. She has also worked within two Race Equality Councils, holding the position of Director in the South East Wales REC.

ANNEX 3

Dear Colleagues

Expert Group on Local Government Diversity - Call for Evidence

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 contained provisions aimed at strengthening local democracy by removing the barriers and disincentives to standing for local election.

The 2011 Measure requires each county and county borough council in Wales to conduct a survey of candidates and councillors at each local election. The results will assess the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at improving diversity in Welsh local councils and build a demographic profile of those standing and being elected.

The first survey was conducted at the May 2012 local elections across Wales and the May 2013 local elections on the Isle of Anglesey. Of those who stood for election in May 2012, 3021 responded to the questionnaire. The results (except in relation to the Isle of Anglesey) were published by the Welsh Government. A link is attached.

<http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/local-government-candidates-survey/?lang=en>

Following publication of the Local Election Survey Results, the Minister for Local Government and Government Business announced her intention to establish an Expert Group to consider the survey results and related matters and to formulate an action plan aimed at improving the diversity of local government ahead of the 2017 local elections.

A copy of the Minister's statement and the terms of reference can be found at:

<http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2013/lgdiversity/?lang=en>

I have been appointed as Chair of the Expert Group and I am writing to ask you or your organisation to consider submitting evidence in relation both to the Local Government Election Survey and, in particular, the issue of diversity of elected representatives in local government more generally. We are seeking evidence based on your knowledge, experience and expertise, and would also welcome any examples of best practice that you might be able to provide.

You might wish to consider the following questions in framing your evidence:

1. Do you think the Local Government Election Survey could be improved in any way? If so, how?
2. What might encourage a higher rate of response to the Local Government Election Survey?
3. In what ways have you used or considered using the survey results in your organisation?
4. What are the main barriers for under represented groups standing for local government?
5. What good examples of programmes or initiatives that promote, support and enhance diversity in terms of representation have you experienced in local government or elsewhere that might be transferable?
6. What initiatives do you think might lead to increased participation by underrepresented groups (particularly women, young people, employed persons, disabled and minority ethnic groups)

The Expert Group will be looking for some case studies to evidence good practice or where improvements could be made in this area. If you or your organisation would be prepared to take part in a more detailed discussion of your evidence or experience please let us know.

We are required to report to the Minister by Christmas. Given the tight time frame it is regrettable that the usual 12 week consultation period is not practical.

I would be grateful if you could submit your evidence to
Christine.Ayres@Wales.gsi.gov.uk by **30 September 2013**.

ANNEX 4

Respondents to the Expert Group's Call for Evidence

Newport City Council

Carmarthenshire County Council

Electoral Reform Society

Ceredigion County Council

Philip Williams

Penarth Town Council

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Isle of Anglesey County Council

Flintshire County Council

Gwynedd County Council

Vale of Glamorgan County Council

Bridgend County Borough Council

Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales

One Voice Wales

Chwarae Teg

Welsh Local Government Association

Llandough Community Council

Welsh Labour Party

Plaid Cymru

Welsh Liberal Democrats