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Evaluation of Diversity in Democracy: Final Report

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

1.1 The Diversity in Democracy (DiD) programme ran from July 2014 to March 2017 and was funded and delivered by the Welsh Government. The programme was designed to deliver a set of recommendations outlined in *On Balance*, an independent report that called for action to address a lack of diversity in Welsh local government (Expert Group in Diversity in Local Government, 2014). The DiD programme aimed to increase the number of local government candidates from diverse backgrounds, through a number of delivery strands:

- Mentoring Initiative
- Communications Campaign
- Employer Engagement Initiative
- Door to Democracy
- Engagement with political parties

1.2 The evaluation of DiD is based on a Theory of Change approach and provides a series of conclusions and recommendations for Welsh Government (and other relevant organisations) to take forward when seeking to address unequal representation among elected officials in local government. This final report details the findings of achievements made by the DiD programme from a desk-based review of programme documentation, and a series of fieldwork exercises.

2. Delivery and achievements

2.1 The **Mentoring Initiative** was successful in recruiting both mentees and mentors from a range of political affiliations, diverse backgrounds, and local authorities. Alongside mentoring, this strand provided training to participants to develop their skills and confidence in local government (such as in delivering presentations). In total, 20 out of 22 local authorities took part, and the initiative recruited 64 mentors and 51 mentees. At the end of the programme, 20 of these mentees were open to standing in a local government election. Other long-term effects include increased knowledge and awareness of local government, and some mentees reported that they had used the skills gained to become more active in other areas of public life (such as by becoming a school governor). For mentors, some reported that they were now more aware of barriers faced by people from diverse backgrounds in participating in local government, and many stated they would be interested taking part in future mentoring initiatives.

- 2.2 The **Communications Campaign** had two goals: to promote the opportunity to participate in the programme to potential mentees, and to raise community awareness and engagement in local government. Overall, this strand was successful in achieving its objectives of developing materials to disseminate at events (leaflets), using media outlets (magazines and radio), building an online presence (social media, and a website), and attending events. Promotional activities were also achieved through collaboration with equalities networks and groups such as Chwarae Teg and One Voice Wales, though these relationships dwindled throughout the programme's delivery. The budget was allocated based on it being a forerunner to a longer campaign due to timings in the electoral cycle. The Communications Campaign achieved an increased awareness of the scheme – however did not have the right level of resource to effectively change perceptions of local government across Wales.
- 2.3 To further develop understanding of diversity in local government, an initial aim of the DiD programme was to promote the Local Government Candidates Survey, to boost responses and improve the information it provided. This work was however undertaken by the policy team within Welsh Government, rather than directly by the DiD programme. Overall the number of responses fell - 3,394 in 2012, to 1,701 in 2017.
- 2.4 To further promote the mentoring strand and encourage participation in local government, the DiD programme delivered an **Employer Engagement Initiative**. This had some limited achievements, with some communication tools provided to employers, and events delivered (such as a 'Question Time' event with Welsh Ambulance Service). This strand of the programme was not fully delivered. Findings from the fieldwork, however, demonstrated that engagement with employers is necessary to address barriers that some councillors face in entering work during or after an elected term.
- 2.5 The **Door to Democracy** strand of delivery was intended to provide financial support to potential candidates who were disabled. Despite a number of steps taken (cost modelling and scoping), this strand was not delivered due to regulations that prevented Welsh Government directly funding candidates, and what was deemed to be the prohibitive financial cost of outsourcing this activity to an external, independent body. Nevertheless, some direct funding was provided to DiD programme participants to enable them to participate (such as for BSL interpreters).

The DiD programme aimed to engage with **political parties** to address how selection procedures for local government candidates could be more inclusive. This strand of delivery saw some achievement against programme objectives by regular updates to political parties by email, and engagement by some party leaders.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Recommendations from the evaluation were that any future programme delivered by Welsh Government to increase diversity of candidates / councillors in local government, embeds a **development phase**, from which to timetable key activities, plan resource for team members, and embed monitoring and evaluation processes. A mentoring programme **should recognise the limits** of what barriers it can address and plan its objectives / outcomes accordingly. Institutional and structural barriers – such as levels of remuneration and time – remain an issue that affects the success of mentoring in increasing the number of diverse candidates.
- 3.2 In any future projects, it is recommended that the development phase clearly defines the **target participants** of the programme and tailors support around their needs. For example, it could consider the extent to which they were active in public life beforehand, and which outcomes are realistic.
- 3.3 A need to address **public perceptions** of local government remains, as misperceptions about the role of councillors and negative attitudes towards elected officials continues to be a barrier to participation. A publicity and communications campaign should be launched to tackle this. Specific issues highlighted within the fieldwork includes public misperceptions about the level of remuneration, what services councils are responsible for, and the number of hours councillors spend on their duties.

- 3.4 A future scheme should **work with employers and councillors**, to address perceptions about the skills gained during the role of councillor. It should recognise the different needs of employers (such as skills needs) and engage from this premise.
- 3.5 There is a **significant need** for a programme based on the Access to Elected Office / **Door to Democracy** scheme in Wales, due to the various barriers faced by disabled people when standing for election, as well as during their tenure as a councillor. This is a tangible barrier to participation in local government that Welsh Government can address and should be explored further.
- 3.6 Engagement with political parties should ensure cross-party buy-in, and respect that **different selection procedures** (such as use of all women's shortlists, zipping, or quota-based interventions) may reflect political ideology. Nevertheless, there is room to address unconscious bias – primarily on selection panels.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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