

DLG 11

Ymchwiliad i amrywiaeth ym maes llywodraeth leol

Inquiry into diversity in local government

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Hil Cymru

Response from: Race Council Cymru

Overview

Race Council Cymru is an umbrella body of different organisations working together to combat prejudice, race discrimination, harassment and violence. It operates to promote art, heritage and cultural activities for black and minority ethnic communities in Wales.

The Welsh Assembly Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee has announced that they will be undertaking an inquiry into diversity in local government.¹ We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

Race Council Cymru believes unequivocally that diversity amongst local councillors is extremely important, in all aspects of identity, particularly as outlined by the Equality Act 2010. As elected representatives, county councillors have a duty and responsibility that “due regard”² is given to matters of equality under the 2010 Act. This must include advancing opportunities between people, fostering good relations and in the creation of documentation such as Equality Impact Assessments.

From 2001-2011 the population of black and minority ethnic individuals in Wales doubled.³ At the time of writing we are 3 years from the next census report and evidence from the Oxford Migration Observatory and other sources indicates that we will potentially see that population double again from 2011-2021. Consequently, we see a need for councillors to reflect the communities who they are serving and anticipate a large democratic deficit around the representation of BAME councillors.

Between 2012 and 2017 there was an increase of 1.2% in elected BAME councillors in Wales, however there was a slight decrease in the total percentage of BAME candidates for the county councillor roles.⁴ The 1.8% of current local authority representatives who are BAME is evidently not representative of the 4.4% of Wales’ population that is BME, and the rate of growth in representation does not reflect the rate of growth in BAME population in Wales.

Terms of Reference

The consultation’s terms of reference offer opportunity to take stock of the over-arching areas of implementation that are needed. We understand the terms of reference to be as follows:

- To understand the importance of diversity among local councillors, including the effect on public engagement, debate and decision making.
- To understand key barriers to attracting a more diverse pool of candidates for local government elections.
- To explore areas of innovation and good practice that may help increase diversity in local government.
- To explore the potential impact of the proposals in the Welsh Government’s Green Paper, Strengthening Local Government to increasing diversity in Council chambers.

¹ <https://www.assembly.wales/en/newhome/pages/newsitem.aspx?itemid=1867>

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/1>

³ <https://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2012/121217sb1262012en.pdf>

⁴ <https://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/130503-local-government-candidates-survey-en.pdf> & <https://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2018/180502-local-government-candidates-survey-2017-en.pdf>

Race Council Cymru offers the following broad responses and thoughts in relation to these terms of reference.

Importance of Diversity

Diversity of elected representatives is vital to fostering good relations between people and addressing the diverse needs of the represented population. Improvement of diversity in local government must be on-going and genuine, and there must be rigorous self-analysis and criticism to achieve this. For example, the Welsh Government's Diversity in Democracy Programme⁵ ran for three years, and was publicly praised,⁶ but examination is needed of such projects for their failings as well as their successes – as reflected upon above, there has not been a significant increase in BAME candidates or representatives in the period 2012-2017, which encompasses the period during which the Diversity in Democracy Programme ran.

Barriers

There are several barriers that affect diverse communities in accessing democratic representation at all areas of local and national government in Wales and in Westminster. The current lack of BAME representation, for example, might suggest to people that standing for local government roles is not for them. There is a prevailing perception of local authorities being “for white people only” mainly white, middle to upper class may deter potential candidates from applying for positions.

Socio-economic disadvantage amongst the BAME population can affect opportunity through poverty related ideologies and lack of confidence. However, it must be considered that there are many individuals who are educated to a high standard and still face barriers. Despite a strong sense of ambition and motivation amongst BAME individuals, there is a sense of lingering racism and prejudice in the workplace. Our Race Council Cymru research in 2012, 2015 and 2016 all identify everyday racism as a key factor blighting the lives and opportunities of individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds achieving their full potential and applying for senior executive and management positions (8). Racial disparity in the UK is prevalent and there are well-reported episodes of institutionalised racism.

A vital consideration in addressing these issues, is to create a link between political representation and local communities. It is simply not enough to post leaflets through the doors of those who are hard to reach. Political and authoritative figures have to meet face to face with BAME communities. The use of third sector organisations such as Race Council Cymru would provide an example of a bridging method, whereby through the use of the charities community connections, rapport and trust could be built.

With time, schemes could be negotiated such as internships, shadowing and peer mentoring which would create the opportunity of having role models in the community who could offer hope, encouragement and a sense of purpose for those in hard to reach communities.

In addressing this matter it is important to note that the barriers are frequently multiple, e.g. socio-economic barriers might also disproportionately affect BAME individuals. Therefore, addressing multiple barriers will form an important part of addressing individual barriers. There needs to be an improved sense of trust in the democratic process and in the work and research that is committed in improving matters of diversity – this includes the membership of committees such as the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee.

Good Practice

⁵ <https://gov.wales/topics/localgovernment/diversity-in-democracy/?lang=en>

⁶ <https://gov.wales/newsroom/localgovernment/2016/161013-diversity-in-democracy-programme/?lang=en>

The Welsh Assembly Local Government Candidates survey (2012 and 2017) are welcome interjections in surveying and understanding the demographics of candidates. However, the percentage of respondents to these surveys is low. Areas of innovation here might involve the recording of demographic information at the point of candidate registration, which can then be analysed, reported and acted upon. Elected representatives should be working constantly to improve the diversity of their provision in relation to their local authority and it must not be seen solely as a bureaucratic activity.

Green Paper

Race Council Cymru anticipates the forthcoming reports on the Strengthening Local Government: Delivering for People green paper, although we note that amongst the respondents to the original consultation, none were representing race organisations in Wales. We welcome the rigorous EIA⁷ produced in relation to this paper, and hope that many of the suggestions within – such as a social media awareness campaign – are put into practice.

Close

In order to enact the “due regard” that elected local government councillors must give to matters of equality, including matters of race, diversity of representatives needs to improve. Councillors with diverse racial, ethnic, faith, religious or national identities are able to bring these viewpoints and lived experiences to promote and foster good relations between people from different communities, while being in a unique position to positively affect and advance equality in Wales in serving the wider public.

⁷ <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2018-03/180322-local-gov-equality-impact.pdf>

⁸ https://www.equality-ne.co.uk/downloads/807_breaking-down-barriers.pdf