

Wales Race Forum- Stand Alone Meeting to Discuss Diversity in Local Government Survey Results

3.30-4.30pm Tuesday 24th January 2023 - Via MS Teams

Attendance

Name - Organisation
Stuart Evans – Acting Chair, Equality & Human Rights Division (WG)
Representatives from:
Churches Together in Wales CYTUN
Tai Pawb
Race Equality First (REF)
Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
Race Council Cymru (RCC)
EYST and ARWAP External Accountability Group
North Wales Regional Equality Network (NWREN)
Equality & Human Rights Division (WG)
Equality & Human Rights Division (WGG)
Knowledge and Analytical Services (WG)
Democracy, Diversity and Renumeration (WG)
Local Government Policy (WG)

Apologies:

Jane Hutt – Minister for Justice

Meeting notes

Discussion
<u>1: Welcome and opening remarks</u> The Chair welcomed everyone to the Meeting.
<u>2: Diversity in Local Government Survey Results Interview</u>

A representative of WG talked about working with Local Government Democracy over the last two years on Councillor remuneration and engagement with citizens and communities. Since the last phase of research online events have been shared with councillors about the findings.

A PowerPoint presentation was shared on the background and key themes. Officials undertook a research project on the role of councillors, also working with One Voice Wales. The presentation focused on findings from the survey which looks at motivations and opinions on the role of councillors. Councillors felt that their understanding of the role changed over time in post, described the limitations of time and distance from the decision-making process, and misconceptions about their ability to resolve issues.

Responses also covered the downsides of the role and workload and awareness of entitlement to payment and expenses. Payments of allowances and expenses are a source of contention among councillors and the public. Overall, respondents are opposed to the idea of councillors receiving payment for their work. The survey revealed widespread instances of offensive behaviour towards councillors and reported that this is increasing both online and in public.

The report is available on the Welsh Government website, and questions can be directed to officials. The meeting Chair asked about the causes of abuse and intimidation, in addition to common themes such as Brexit and Covid 19 and a sense of alienation from the political process. A WG representative said that councillors feel that people are more prepared to abuse councillors and feel that councillors should expect to deal with this. If the research were repeated, then we could look in greater detail at issues like racial abuse and misogyny.

3 : Discussion and Questions

A representative of the EYST and ARWAP External Accountability Group asked about the justification for not being able to disaggregate data on race in the survey.

A WG representative said that because numbers were low, going into detail could make people identifiable if describing local areas etc. Gaining a larger sample would enable us to look in greater detail. There is data we haven't been able to explore yet owing to time commitments. We can go into more detail in the future.

A representative from CYTUN asked what we can do about the results? We appear to be going backwards. In the past the Commission for Racial Equality would challenge unacceptable behaviour in councils. Online abuse seems to multiply the effect. We are a long way off getting local democracy to reflect Welsh society.

Research is useful but we need a serious discussion about what kind of Wales we want.

A representative of NWREN said the report is a catalogue of reasons why nobody would want to be a councillor. We should replace the term local democracy with local politics or local government. It is dispiriting working with councillors, where the focus tends to be purely on older voters in their area with no regard for policy or wider issues. Freemasonry was also an issue.

A representative of WG said Freemasonry wasn't mentioned specifically but may be underlying in some issues mentioned in terms of misogyny, which gives us an insight into issues to be tackled. There is a breakdown of data in the Findings section.

A representative of RCC described abuse and bullying of black councillors by male white councillors reported to her and that the Welsh Government needs to hold individuals to account. Swansea is a city of sanctuary and human rights but only two black female councillors, and that she experienced abuse when running for councillor. Attitudes need to change, WG needs to work with the WLGA, local authorities need to train councillors in anti-racism. How can things improve if councillors themselves are opposed to progress?

A WG representative said that although we have to ensure anonymity, if we have 70-80 ethnically diverse people it should be possible to consider differences between perceptions of abuse. A WG representative said that this research sits alongside other data and this is considered alongside an initial analysis of this survey. We held workshop events recently and gathered more information before considering next steps.

A Welsh Government Representative said they would return to the group to contribute when more detail was known as there's lots of anecdotal information. The Minister is keen to address abuse.

The meeting Chair said we need to revisit this issue and will highlight to the ARWAP External Accountability Group. A representative from REF said we have legislation in place, the Equality Act, PSED etc. but we need to enforce them. In most public services the EA 2010 isn't being used. We need to be using this pathway to make impact.

4: Closing Remarks and Further Action

The meeting Chair thanked everyone and said we would need to return to the subject.

