Removing barriers to elected office for people with protected characteristics: Theory of change

Title: Removing barriers to elected office for people with protected characteristics: Theory of change

Author(s): Hannah Smith and Ieuan Davies

For further information please contact:

Hannah Smith

Internal Research Programme

Knowledge and Analytical Services

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

Tel: 03000622308

Email: RhYF.IRP@gov.wales

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Glossary

Acronym / Key word	Definition
A2EOF	Access to Elected Office Fund
ERS	Electoral Reform Society
GSR	Government Social Research
IRP	Internal Research Programme
KAS	Knowledge and Analytical Services
LGBTQI+	Pertaining collectively to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or those questioning their gender identity or sexual orientation), and intersex[1]
LGD	Local Government Democracy division
Neurodivergent	People who are neurodiverse have brains that function in a different way to that usually considered as normal[2]
PC	Protected characteristic
PSB	Public Services Board
ToC	Theory of Change
WLGA	Welsh Local Government Association
WYP	Welsh Youth Parliament

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[1] LGBTIQ definition taken from Dictionary.com
[2] Neurodiverse definition taken from Collins dictionary

1. Background

1.1 The Internal Research Programme (IRP, Knowledge and Analytical Services, Welsh Government) was commissioned in October 2021 by the Local Government Democracy Division (LGD, Covid Recovery and Local Government Group, Welsh Government) to undertake research looking into the under-representation of groups with protected characteristics (PCs) in local politics in Wales. The purpose for commissioning this research was to inform the development of a programme for increasing diversity and representation in Welsh local government. Research into diversity issues at the national level was recently published by the Welsh Parliament's Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform (2022).

1.2 Diversity within governing institutions is essential for a healthy democracy. Collectively, elected persons hold a lot of power and most of their work is done transparently; however, transparency does not equate to accessibility (Democracy Club, 2022). The under-representation of some identity groups suggests an inequality of access compared to majority groups (Evans and Reher, 2020). Members' personal and professional backgrounds influence decision-making, with many factors - including gender, race, class, education, socio-economic background, occupation and parental status - shaping the priorities of elected representatives (Barnes and Holman, 2020).

1.3 The Welsh Government has committed to reform local government elections to reduce the democratic deficit in its Programme for Government (Welsh Government, 2021a), in part by tackling the barriers that prevent full participation in standing for election and representing their communities (Welsh Government, 2021b). The diversification of political candidates requires consideration of the different PCs as well as socio-economic status in line with the Socio-economic Duty (Welsh Government, 2021c).

1.4 Protected characteristics are those defined by the Equality Act (2010) as follows: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. As individuals may have more than one PC or other socio-political characteristic, it is essential that intersectionality was explored and understood when addressing barriers to entering political life.

1.5   A report commissioned in 2014 recommended the implementation of a scheme similar to the UK Government's Access to Elected Office Fund for the 2017 local government elections in Wales (Expert Group on Local Government Diversity, 2014). The UK fund supported disabled candidates to stand for elected office (Government Equalities Office, 2018). However, due to numerous complex issues, it was not possible for the fund to be established in the 2017 Welsh local government elections. The Access to Elected Office Fund Wales pilot (Disability Wales, 2021) has since been established. This funding was made available for disabled candidates of the 2021 Senedd elections and the 2022 local government elections, and was available to cover costs including assistive aids, training, travel, personal assistance and communication support (Welsh Government, 2022a).

1.6   A publication by the Electoral Reform Society Cymru (ERS) reported a significant under-representation of women and people with other PCs in Welsh local politics (Blair and Mathias, 2018). There have been calls to improve representation in the existing political framework in Wales, for example by creating gender balance in both Senedd and Local Government in Wales using legally binding quotas (WEN Wales, 2020) or establishing an access to politics fund for under-represented groups (Awan-Scully et al., 2018). The existing pilot Fund is available for disabled people only; other PC groups are still unable to access support of this kind. Welsh Government is seeking to expand on existing schemes to create a programme that provides support for people who face barriers in entering politics. The Programme for Government 2022 also commits to expand the Access to Elected Office Fund (A2EOF), which will form part of this support.

Aims and objectives

1.7   The aim of this research was to create a Theory of Change (ToC) that maps the inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes of an intervention(s) associated with removing barriers to elected office for people with protected characteristics (PCs). From the ToC a logic model was constructed, which can be used for developing the intervention as well as monitoring and evaluation planning.

1.8   To achieve this aim, the research addresses the following objectives:

- To draw on existing work and literature on (and relevant to) gender quotas and access to elected office funds in order to understand the context and progress of

each in Wales and, where appropriate, examples from further afield (UK and internationally)

- Consult with colleagues responsible for developing and delivering future gender quotas and access to elected office funds policies, to define the key concepts and establish the focus for the ToC

- Establish a first draft ToC in collaboration with policy makers and external stakeholders to gauge their understanding of the key activities and to define intended outcomes of any potential future policy

- Produce a report containing a revised ToC (following consultation with policy officials), an analysis of the key issues and risks of delivering the intervention logics and advice on baseline data.

Report structure

This report sets out the methodology for the research, key themes from the evidence reviews, findings from the research, a discussion and recommendations relating to the ToC.

2.   Methodology

2.1   The methodological approach involved two elements: evidence review and theory of change. The latter informed the development of the logic model, which can be found on pages 15 and 16 The methods for each element are detailed in this section.

Evidence reviews

2.2   IRP researchers carried out **two evidence reviews on the broad themes of barriers to political participation**: one on barriers as experienced by disabled people and one as those experienced by women. The reviews referred to the Access to Elected Office Fund and gender quotas as examples of major policy interventions.

2.3   The reviews referred to and built upon existing literature searches conducted by Welsh Government's Library Services; one in July 2019 on 'Effects of using certain voting systems on gender balance in legislatures and local councils', and one in April 2020 on 'Diversity in Democracy'. Key literature from these collections were drawn upon for the purposes of this research.

2.4   Supplementary literature searches were conducted by the IRP researchers to address data gaps, including the most recently published research. These searches were conducted via various search engines and open access literature platforms, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Sage Open and Elsevier. Identified literature was coded to reflect emerging themes, including intersectionality of multiple PCs for example the intersectionality between class and gender, race and gender, sexuality and gender, and age and gender.

2.5   Grey literature was drawn upon in addition to academic research. Critical assessment of the quality of such literature was made by the researchers, although documentation lacking peer review is less likely to be as methodologically robust as peer-reviewed research and this should be kept in mind. Grey literature was used to ensure the most up-to-date trends were identified outside purely academic fields.

2.6   Two evidence reviews were produced and then refined with input from LGD policy officials. The reviews informed the development of the context around the logic model.

Theory of change (ToC)

2.7　The purpose of the ToC was to develop **a logic model that maps the process to achieving the intended outcomes** of an intervention or policy. ToC incorporates the synthesis of evidence, an examination of the existing context, tests the assumptions underlying the intervention logic and identifies the risks to define how an intervention is expected to work in practice (HM Treasury, 2020). When constructing the ToC, it is best practice to start from the anticipated outcomes and work backwards to map the process for achieving the intended results. The final logic model is a valuable tool for scoping the evaluation for any future intervention(s) that the LGD team implement.

2.8　Extensive collaboration with a range of stakeholders is the best way to develop a ToC that can be tested from a variety of perspectives (HM Treasury, 2020). To encapsulate a wide range of stakeholder views, it was agreed between the researchers and LGD policy officials that **three ToC workshops** were held: one with policy officials and two with external stakeholders. The first external stakeholder workshop was attended by representatives from equalities organisations supporting different PC groups. Participating organisations in this workshop can be found in table 1. The second external stakeholder workshop was attended by people representing local government organisations.

2.9　For the purposes of analysis, the workshops will hereon be referred to as follows:

- Workshop with Welsh Government officials - 'Policy officials' workshop'

- Workshop with stakeholders from equalities organisations - 'Equalities workshop'

- Workshop with stakeholders from local government organisations - 'Local government workshop'

Recruitment and planning

2.10　Contact details for internal and public sector participants were provided by the Local Government Democracy team, with recruitment of external participants supported by the Equality Branch (Education, Social Justice and Welsh Language, Welsh Government). Existing stakeholder networks were used to advertise workshops to institutions representative of each protected characteristic (PC).

2.11　Interested stakeholders were contacted with an invitation to attend their respective online workshop via email. Bilingual preparatory materials were developed ahead of the

sessions; these included UKGDPR-compliant privacy notices and theory of change information sheets for research participants. The privacy notice and information sheets were attached to the email invites. The workshops were scheduled for 90 minutes each.

2.12   In the event that an invitee could not attend, or no response to the initial invitation was received, alternative stakeholders were contacted. Where invitees were unable to attend but expressed an interest to contribute, a written submission template was provided by e-mail, developed to reflect the content and structure of the workshop topic guide. Workshop attendees were also offered the option to submit any information omitted during the online sessions via e-mail and all submissions received by 16th March deadline were included within the analysis.

Summary of participants

From the 38 stakeholder groups contacted, 24 participants were in attendance across the three online workshops, with one additional submission received by e-mail. Of the nine PCs, five were directly represented by contribution via an associated organisation, two were in-directly represented as crosscutting characteristics, and two were not represented due to non-attendance. While individual and organisation names are omitted in the interest of participant anonymity, a summary of represented characteristics is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Representation of protected characteristics

Protected Characteristic	Representation
Age	Direct
Disability	Direct
Sex	Direct
Race	Direct
Religion or Belief	Direct
Pregnancy and Maternity	In-direct
Marriage and Civil Partnership	In-direct
Gender Reassignment	Not represented
Sexual Orientation	Not represented

NB: Individual participants may represent multiple characteristics.

Workshop facilitation

2.13   The limit set by IRP researchers for participant numbers in the workshops was between 10 and 12. This enables contributions to be heard from a range of perspectives but not so many that there is insufficient time to cover all (May, 2011). During primary data collection, the maximum attendance to any one workshop was 10 participants and no discussion exceeded the 90 minutes scheduled.

2.14   At the beginning of each workshop, the facilitator(s) outlined the purpose and structure of the workshop. Each session was recorded using the Microsoft Teams functionality. Based on ethical principles of informed consent, participants were reminded of the recording function at the session and were offered the opportunity to not partake prior to recording.

2.15   IRP researchers used workshop topic guides to focus the discussion on the different aspects of ToC (see Figure 1 for a visual depiction of the stages included in theory of change). The topic guides were developed prior to the sessions, and owing to the limited time of the workshops, were centred around four key ToC aspects: outcomes, activities, inputs and risks (to achieving the outcomes). The **outcomes** describe the intended short- and medium- term results; in order to achieve these, the ToC identifies what **activities** (i.e., actions) and **inputs** (i.e., resources) are required. The **risks** do not form part of the causal chain in the ToC but are important for identifying weaknesses and potential challenges to delivering the outcomes, which is why they were included in the workshops.

2.16   The other elements of the ToC were not covered in the workshops but developed retrospectively by the researchers. These are the impacts (i.e., long-term effects), outputs (i.e., tangible products / materials), contextual factors (e.g., current situation, policies, identified needs) and assumptions around the different stages of the ToC.

2.17   The internal workshop was facilitated by two IRP researchers, whilst another IRP researcher documented the conversation via virtual 'sticky notes' using Microsoft Whiteboard. The external workshops were facilitated by one IRP researcher and supported by a placement student to manage the Whiteboard and note-taking. All workshops were completed by mid-March 2022.

Figure 1. Example Theory of Change elements
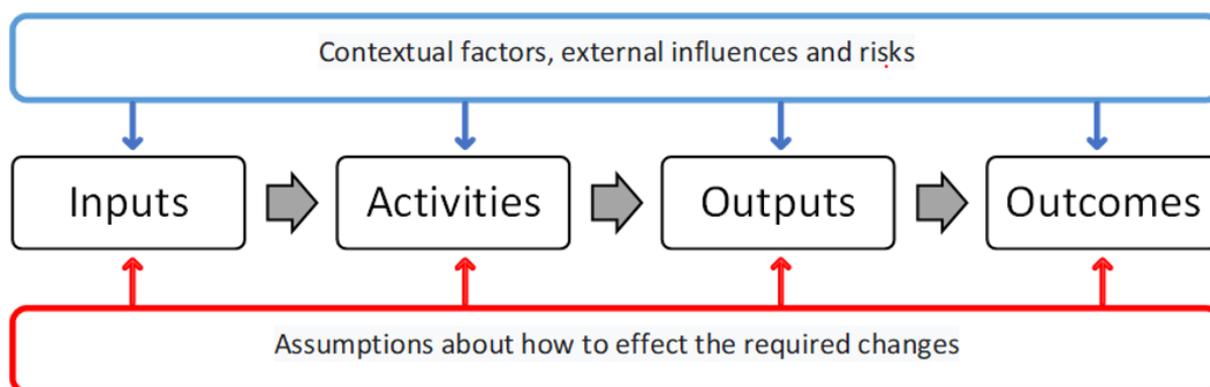
Post-workshop data processing

2.18   Following the completion of the workshops, each one was transcribed and stored securely on Welsh Government databases. Access to these files was strictly limited to the IRP researchers only. Files were stored and retained in line with UK GDPR regulations.

2.19   The transcriptions were then coded using a combination of MAXQDA and Microsoft Excel by the IRP researchers in preparation for data analysis. Abductive thematic analysis was then undertaken to identify and develop themes across the workshop transcripts and written submissions, with findings from the literature used to produce the initial codebook and emergent themes added during subsequent iterations (Thompson, 2022).

Developing the logic model

2.20   An iterative approach was adopted in developing the logic model. The first draft of the logic model was constructed using data collected through the workshop with government officials. Data was grouped by ToC stages; these included outcomes, outputs, activities, inputs, context, assumptions and risks. Policy leads were invited to review and advise on the first draft and amendments were made accordingly. The second iteration incorporated data collected through the workshops with external stakeholders and was revised and refined by IRP researchers. Policy leads reviewed the updated draft model; this step was included to ensure that the logic model was contextually sound and accurate.

Methodological strengths and limitations

2.21   There were limitations to the methodology. Only open-access literature was available, unless highly relevant evidence was identified and request for access was granted and funded by Welsh Government's Library services. Though extensive, evidence reviews were therefore unable to provide a complete picture all research to-date. Moreover, a scarcity of non-academic data on certain areas of interest necessitated the use of sources with potential vested interests. These were predominantly third-sector organisations aligned with one or more protected groups. Despite steps taken to ensure the veracity of such data, the potential influence of reporting and sampling bias cannot be discounted entirely.

2.22   Sample representativeness in the primary research was also limited. Considerable efforts were made to encourage representation for all PCs, however low response rates and non-attendance meant that full representativeness was not possible. Those attending on behalf of more heterogeneous characteristics were not fully representative of all sub-groups. For example, it was neither practical nor possible to secure representation for every belief, religion, or ethnicity group currently present within the Welsh population.

2.23   Due to time and resource constraints, it was only possible to facilitate three workshops. With more time, it would have been valuable to gather views from a wider range of stakeholders, including political parties and people with experience of standing for elected office. In addition, through invitees were offered accessibility adjustments and alternative methods of participation upon request, online workshops via Microsoft Teams were the default method of data collection. This was a potential deterrent to both those unfamiliar with, or unable to access, the necessary technology and those who may experience existing obstacles to communication, such as language barriers and certain impairments.

2.24   With sufficient mitigation however, the research design was deemed to be most appropriate within the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the parameters of the available time and resources. The group discussion format was effective in generating productive conversations that explored both established and new information and ideas.

Further strengths of the methodology include that the primary research (workshop data) was supplemented by secondary research (evidence reviews). Findings from the workshops could be supported or challenged by academic research, increasing the robustness of the analysis. The research was ethically sound: participation in the research was completely voluntary and participants were given the option to withdraw at any time. All participants gave their informed consent by accepting the invitation to partake based on the privacy notice (provided ahead of the workshops).

3.   Findings

3.1   This section presents findings from both strands of the research: evidence reviews and theory of change (ToC). For the evidence reviews findings, the key themes and most pertinent points are drawn out as they relate to barriers to representation within local and national government in Wales.

3.2   Two evidence reviews were conducted:

1. The under-representation of women in Welsh local government

2. Barriers to elected office for disabled people

The main findings of the evidence reviews contributed to understanding the context of the issues around under-representation in local government in Wales, in turn informing this element of the ToC. Literature from this work is cited throughout to enhance and deepen the analysis. The findings from the ToC workshops are presented under the different stages of the logic model. The context and barriers are discussed first to establish the existing need and requirements. The remaining elements of the ToC are described, starting with the outcomes, then outputs, activities and inputs. The risks and underlying assumptions associated with the ToC are also explored.

Logic model

3.3   The logic model depicted on pages 15 and 16 is a visual representation of the theory of change.

Figure 2: Logic model

Context (barriers)	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
For candidates for elected office with protected characteristics:	**People**	**Support candidates and elected members**	**Participation**	**People with PCs are:**
Campaigning may be more expensive if additional costs are required to be able to fully partake	Expertise in politics, youth and community engagement and media to share knowledge and communicate information to the public	Design and implement effective strategies for eliminating abuse, harassment and discrimination	Diverse candidate pool that represents the population	Confident in the ability of the political process to represent them and their interests
Access to and knowledge of support during the campaign process can be limited or inaccessible		Facilitate support networks for elected members with PCs	Increased participation levels across all stages of the political process	Engaged with the political world
Accepting financial assistance (e.g. from grants) may be seen as culturally or socially undesirable		Provide ongoing support during the period in office for members with PCs to enable them to carry out their role effectively	Increased levels of voter turnout	Informed about politics and how it affects them
Selection processes can be biased towards candidates without PC, making it more difficult to gain support	WG officials to support LG in increasing diversity	Provide centrally-managed resources for day-to-day activities, e.g., printing, social media support		Involved in democratic processes
Experience of discrimination based on identity may be more prevalent	LG officials to ensure that democracy is upheld in the selection process and that candidates / members are fully supported	Support members with caring responsibilities	**Representation**	Represented by their elected members
Venues that an elected member is expected to attend (e.g., government buildings, party conferences) can be inaccessible for physically disabled people		Review the salary and benefits package for elected members to ensure it is fair and reflective of the role	Descriptive representation of people with PCs in LG	Respected amongst the wider community as active and participating citizens
Incumbency can increase competition during the campaign process, as fewer opportunities for new candidates are available	Political leaders to promote equality and diversity in LG	Provide financial support for those with additional costs relating to PCs		Valued for the experience and contributions they provide both politically and socially
For elected members with protected characteristics:	**Organisations**	Provide targeted support for independent candidates and members with PCs	Guidance and legislation protecting interests of all citizens, including those with PCs	
The remuneration package may not be sufficient to cover additional and essential costs associated with PCs	Local authorities to promote an inclusive culture	Allow co-opting, so that minority voices are represented at all levels of decision making		**Elected members are:**
The working culture within local government can be exclusionary and feel unwelcoming	WG to drive change and lead by example	Introduce diversity strategies and targets for attaining representation	LG policy documentation that promotes inclusivity in decision making	Accessible to the people in their community
The demands of the role can be more challenging if adequate support is not in place		Provide opportunities to mentor and shadow more experienced elected members		Engaged with their community and people with PCs
Claiming on expenses may be avoided in attempts to deflect negative attention	Political parties to implement change and support elected members regardless of background	Have flexible working practices that enable people with PCs to carry out their role effectively (e.g., job sharing, hybrid working, flexible hours)	Public services delivered by LG that are accessible to all	Held accountable for their actions and political conduct
There is a lack of support once in elected office; for example, the A2EOF is only available during campaign phase	LG organisations to provide support and assistance to local authorities and elected members	Providing essential training on diversity and inclusion for all elected members	**Equality**	Informed about the impact of decision-making on under-represented groups and people with PCs
Processes for responding to discrimination, bullying and harassment may not always be adequate to prevent future instances		**Improve public awareness of local government**	Fewer instances of discrimination	Representative of the diversity in their local communities; more elected members are people with PCs
	Third sector organisations to advocate for people with PCs	Provide accessible information about the role of elected members and available support in standing for office	Allocation of resources based on need	Trusted by the electorate to effectively represent their interests, particularly those for people with PCs
		Raise awareness of local government, its role in society and the value of representation		

Insufficient data collection practices mean understandings of (under)representation are limited and evidence for policy-makers is lacking

Long meetings, hustings and door-to-door canvassing can be more difficult (e.g. for physically disabled members)

Electoral wards that are larger, rural, or where infrastructure and public transport is limited, can make it more difficult for some people with PCs to do the work required from an elected member

For prospective candidates with protected characteristics and the public:

A person's ability to campaign/stand for election/work as an elected member where they have one or more protected characteristics might be poorly understood

Previously reported incidences of abuse and harassment of elected members can make the role seem undesirable

Engagement with political processes is variable, with under-represented groups the least likely to engage or be politically educated, causing feelings of exclusion

Language used in politics and local government can be inaccessible and jargonistic

Lack of trust in government institutions can prevent willingness to engage

People with PCs are less likely to have opportunities to gain relevant skills, experience and education needed for elected office

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Funding

For education, to increase political awareness in under-represented communities and the general public

For additional individual campaign costs faced by people with PCs

For programmes and schemes to support prospective candidates and existing members

For engagement and events to directly target under-represented communities

For administration costs associated with delivering the intervention

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Facilitate engagement events that target under-represented groups

Ensure that language is accessible and avoid use of jargon in communication aimed at the public

Integrate political education into the school curriculum

Provide educational opportunities to people outside the mainstream education system

Improve the evidence base for policy makers

Collect and publish demographic data on parties, candidates and members

Collect monitoring data for evaluating the intervention

Conduct further research to plug evidence gaps

Develop knowledge and understanding across all relevant organisations of the importance of data, analysis and its application to supporting diversity

Assess the role of local government

Implement learning from good practice elsewhere in the UK and internationally

Introduce measures to prevent long-term incumbency and to encourage diversity, such as term limits and succession planning

Support political parties to ensure that their campaign processes are inclusive and accessible for people with PCs

Review selection processes, ensuring that competition is fair and transparent and identifying areas for improvement

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Processes and mechanisms

Support and resources available for candidates and members

Ethical framework for LG organisations and other relevant bodies

Collaborative working practices across the public, private and third sectors

Complete and robust datasets containing monitoring data and demographic information of candidates and members

Accountability frameworks for LG organisations

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Local government is:

Representative of the community it serves

Accessible and inclusive of people with PCs

Fully supportive of elected members with PCs

An attractive place to work for people with PCs

Democratic

A leader in collaborative working between government, communities and organisations

Creates a culture of respect

Responsive to the needs and interests of people with PCs and other under-represented groups in the community it serves

Society is:

Cohesive, yet values diversity

Equitable in terms of resource distribution and access to opportunities

A safe place for people with PCs and free from abuse, harassment or discrimination

Key:
PC – protected characteristics
LG – local government

Context (barriers)

3.4 The 'context' element of the ToC was developed through the findings of the evidence reviews and workshop data. There are three context subcategories in the logic model; these are: barriers for candidates for elected office with protected characteristics, barriers for elected members with protected characteristics, and barriers for prospective candidates with protected characteristics and the public. Reflected in these subcategories are financial, cultural, political, social, and physical barriers. This section illustrates the existing situation that forms the rationale for why an intervention is required.

Barriers for candidates for elected office with protected characteristics

3.5 The costs for candidates with protected characteristics (PCs) are likely to be greater than for candidates without. Access to funds is a necessary part of political campaigning and costs for running for office are substantial (Murray, 2021), as voiced by workshop participants:

> 'Running a campaign is costly if you're not part of a political party. Very, very costly and you know, leaflets, social media promotion, etc.'

> (Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.6 Often, **parties can be reluctant to support personal costs** (Murray, 2021), **leaving many candidates reliant on their own personal funds** (Mariani and Buckley, 2021). This can have a disproportionate impact on people with PCs. For example, candidates from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are likely to experience lower rates of employment and income (Department for Work and Pensions, 2021; Francis-Devine, 2021; ONS, 2020, ONS 2022). The disadvantage experienced by women stems from gender norms that negatively impact women's earning potential; for example, women typically earning less than men (Murray, 2021), doing a much greater proportion of unpaid labour (Charmes, 2019), taking longer periods of interrupted paid employment and exiting the labour market earlier due to caring responsibilities (Hudson and Gonyea, 2017).

3.7 Candidates with visual and mobility impairments may incur travel costs for accessible transport, while women are more likely to foot childcare costs than their male counterparts (Bazeley et al., 2017; Maguire, 2018) during the campaign process.

'…a lot of [women] are working part-time because they've got caring responsibilities, that generally comes with lower pay as well…on average, they're not likely to have as much disposable income, and that is definitely going to be a barrier.'

(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.8 Another barrier for candidates with PCs is **limited resources available from organisations that support campaigners.** The budgets of political parties, public bodies, community groups and supporting organisations can be insufficient to provide additional support for candidates. The effects of budget cuts can also impact people with PCs. For example, cuts to benefits and public transport disproportionately impact women (Reis, 2018) by affecting their ability to travel and access opportunities.

'…the challenge with some of this is resources, and sometimes not just financial but staff resource as well in local government.'

(Participant, Workshop 1: Policy Officials)

3.9 Some workshop participants noted that **candidates with PCs are less likely to have knowledge of, or access to, campaign support**, which makes entering elected office more difficult:

'…if you're coming into politics, not through the party-political route, you might not even know how campaigns are generally run.'

(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.10 **Reluctance to accept financial assistance for campaigning** is thought to be more prevalent amongst candidates with PCs. The literature identified instances where a candidate's receipt of welfare benefits had been used to discredit them on the campaign trail (Evans and Reher, 2021). Moreover, councillors are reportedly discouraged to claim on expenses such as care allowance (National Assembly for Wales, 2019). One workshop participant warned that targeted funds for candidates with PCs could be used to undermine their credibility:

'… if there is a fund available for certain candidates, say of an ethnic minority background or from a Muslim background, that will be used against them in the political process…and I think that creates a further disadvantage for them when campaigning.'

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3.11   **Selection processes may exclude people with PCs**, according to the literature and workshop data. Previous studies have found that assessment processes can be extensively formal and long which disadvantages people from non-professional backgrounds for example, and poorly planned attempts to provide adjustments can isolate applicants (Evans and Reher, 2020; 2021). Additionally, assumptions regarding the 'ideal candidate' can bias assessors against potential candidates from certain backgrounds (Waltz and Schippers, 2021). This sentiment was echoed by workshop participants:

> '…party political selection processes. They're very really quite inaccessible. They're full of bias.'

(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.12   Further research also suggests that **seat selection can have a considerable influence on election outcomes**. For example, it is reported that women are more likely to be selected to contest marginal seats and therefore less likely to win and subsequently retain office (Farrell and Titcombe, 2016; Maguire, 2018). Candidates from ethnic minority communities are less likely to be selected in non-diverse constituencies (Durose et al., 2011), whilst disabled people can be disadvantaged in rural seats that require extensive travel or lack access to public transport (Evans and Reher, 2021).

3.13   It was found that **traditional routes into politics are favoured and that diverse experiences are not fully appreciated**. Extant literature reports that certain PCs, particularly related to race, have less access to the usual routes into politics (e.g., certain unions, professional bodies and academic institutions) (see Durose et al., 2011; Awan-Scully et al., 2018). Further to this, participants felt that diverse experiences and backgrounds were not valued in the same way during the selection process, despite developing equally beneficial skillsets:

'A lot of the skills that they will have developed, not through paid work or even voluntary work but just through running a household or looking after kids, they're incredibly valuable for somebody who's going to be an advocate at the community level. But that bias, right there in the selection process, won't necessarily pick up on that.'

(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.14   Workshop participants added that **incumbency can reduce the opportunities available to candidates** and limit the pace at which change can be made (Bazeley et al., 2017):

'…there are people who have been an elected representative for a very, very long time. And if they're not particularly diverse, that limits the opportunity to bring diverse voices into politics…'

(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.15   **Campaign processes** were felt to be inaccessible, resource intensive, and heavily dependent on the ability of a candidate to be physically present for events such as party conferences and canvassing:

'The way we campaign is also a bit of a barrier for anybody, particularly when they've got a physical impairment, because it still tends to be 'go out, knock on doors' and if you've got mobility issues [or] if you're blind, it's incredibly difficult…'

(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.16   While the literature evidenced numerous barriers to those with physical, cognitive, and emotional impairments (see Hammel et al., 2015; Evans and Reher, 2020; 2021; Waltz and Schippers, 2021), workshop participants also noted safety risks:

'Two recent general elections happened more wintertime. That was a real concern and I think that did curtail the ability for women to campaign because, you know, there are some places that you just simply don't want to be going as a lone woman knocking on random people's doors in the dark'.

(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.17   The **physical geography of electoral wards** can also cause challenges for people with PCs. One study reported the experience of a blind councillor, who had limited

access to some residences and multiple falls while canvassing (Flint, 2018). Rural areas are less likely to have accessible infrastructure and public transport links, while traffic, access to apartment blocks, and sensory triggers created unique barriers in built-up urban areas (National Council on Independent Living, 2018; Government Office for Science, 2019; Bonehill et al., 2020).

Barriers for elected members with protected characteristics

3.18 **The salary of local councillors was felt to be a significant barrier for people with PCs** amongst workshop participants. It was suggested that councillor remuneration is disproportionate to the amount of work that councillors do. Formal guidance anticipates a councillor to work no more than 21 hours a week (IRPW, 2019), but recent research in Wales found that most councillors worked above this; 15% as much as 41+ hours (Hibbs, 2022). In terms of workloads, one participant noted that:

> '…what puts people off getting involved and standing, it's just the sheer thought of the amount of emails they'll receive, the amount of hours spent at meetings, the length of planning committee agendas. So, you've got planning committees that go on regularly for four or five hours or more…'

> (Participant, Workshop 3: Local Government Officials)

3.19 There is a body of evidence demonstrating that **local government practices are steeped in a predominantly masculine culture,** which manifests practically in terms of working pattern, styles of debating, and even building architecture (Krook, 2018). Normatively, this results in leaders with typically 'masculine' traits, like competitive, confident and ambitious (Krook, 2018). The effect of this expectation of elected members is that people without those traits are less represented within politics and by policies.

3.20 Furthermore, **ways of working within local government may not be accessible to people with PCs**, for example by requiring councillors to attend meetings in person. When the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that remote working is feasible, the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act (2021) was updated, putting a duty on local authorities to enable remote attendance. Councillors now have the legal right to attend meetings virtually, which forms part of Welsh Government's attempt to

encourage more representational diversity in local politics (Hibbs, 2022). At the same time, this new way of working may not suit everyone:

> '…for those older people who aren't able to be online, whether it's because you don't have the skills or maybe they don't have the equipment…people actually physically can't access those meetings to be part of those kind of election processes and that is actually a barrier which maybe wasn't as visible before [the Covid-19 pandemic] …'

<div align="right">(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)</div>

3.21   Support, such as the Access to Elected Office Fund (A2EOF), has previously been available for disabled candidates. Currently, the availability of this type of support does not extend post-election, or to helping people with different PCs, whilst in office. **There is a need to provide support for elected members with PCs throughout their term in office,** not just during campaigning. Research has supported the argument that providing ongoing support and training for elected members would increase retention, develop skills and knowledge, and build confidence (Maguire, 2018).

3.22   **A lack of accountability** in processes such as complaints handling, particularly within political parties, has previously resulted in inadequate protection of candidates and members with PCs. Most notably, reviews into Islamophobia in the Conservative Party and antisemitism in both Labour and Plaid Cymru each highlighted **systemic flaws in the handling of complaints relating to discrimination** (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020; Singh, 2020; Saville-Roberts, 2021). These included the inappropriate handling of complaints, lack of process transparency, insufficient resourcing, and improper application of sanctions.

3.23   **Insufficient data collection and monitoring practices** in local government means that understanding of representation is limited and evidence for policymakers is lacking. Although participants noted the efforts made to develop appropriate data collection mechanisms, low participation, inconsistent reporting and overlooked areas were said to restrict the understanding of current diversity levels. In particular, data on elected members with PCs, particularly intersectional identities, was felt to be scarce.

3.24   **The design of political venues can be inaccessible to people with PCs**. In addition to evidence of limited disability parking and restricted access to buildings (Cabinet Office, 2018; House of Lords, 2020; Evans and Reher, 2021), research has highlighted difficulties encountered within political spaces. This included navigational obstacles caused by insufficient light, braille signage, and space for wheelchairs; a lack of family-friendly spaces, childcare facilities, discreet spaces for administering treatment or expressing milk; and designated disabled areas which can be unintentionally exclusionary (Shabi, 2017; Evans and Reher, 2020; Waltz and Schippers, 2020; Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit Panel, 2021). One participant indicated that the physical layout of chambers can contribute to a culture and style of debate which is unwelcoming:

> '…from a gender perspective, the manner in which politics is conducted is often off-putting. You see the difference, I think if you look at Westminster compared to the Senedd, the Senedd is very different. The very physical chamber is different.'
>
> (Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

Barriers for prospective candidates with protected characteristics and the public

3.25   The **role of elected members is considered to be poorly understood** by some parts of the public, particularly those with PCs and other under-represented groups. This means that some elected members may experience unreasonable and unmanageable expectations from the public.

> '…it's the public general public's expectation, unrealistic expectation and that's goes back possibly right to the beginning where we have to say, saying that public needs to be educated about actually what the role of the councillor is…'
>
> (Participant, Workshop 3: Local Government Officials)

One of the main deterring factors for people entering political life is the **abuse, harassment and bullying** which politicians can be subject to. This point was reflected in the language used by workshop participants to describe the experiences of elected members, reporting 'rude' and 'heckling' behaviour, 'intimidation' and 'unkindness'.

3.26   Research into local government in Wales found that **sexist culture tends to be more prevalent in rural areas and the Welsh Valleys** than urban centres (Farrell and Titcombe, 2016). For women living in these areas, the idea of standing for office may be more off-putting than for those in other parts of Wales. Internationally, women's experiences of sexual harassment have historically been dismissed, particularly those of ethnic minority women and women from lower socio-economic groups (Collier and Raney, 2018). A recent study reports that 85.2% of female MPs had been harassed on social media and that younger women (<40 years) 'are more frequently subjected to psychological and sexual harassment' (IPU, 2021a:52). This illustrates the compounded impact of intersectionality on outcomes for prospective candidates with PCs.

3.27   The impact of exposure to this level of abuse perpetuates a **culture of fear**, which is evidenced by various studies. For example, in a survey on 1,500 trainees of the 'Emerge America' scheme, which trains prospective women candidates, 25% said fear of violence was a reason not to pursue a candidacy (Bernhard et al., 2021). Another survey of almost 500 respondents asked about barriers to engagement in local government elections (Bazeley et al., 2017) where 13% of women (compared with 8% of men) identified a 'fear of violence' and 46% of women (compared with 35% of men) said 'harassment or abuse from the electorate' were barriers to standing as councillor.

3.28   The impact of intersectionality is not well understood in terms of public perceptions of elected members. However, a picture can be built by piecing together research studies. For example, it can be derived that the intersection between sexual orientation and gender is an added barrier for women identifying as LGBTQI+, as recent research on the prevalence of workplace bullying shows that lesbian and bisexual women are more vulnerable than gay men (Hoel et al., 2021). A global consensus is now emerging that **violence in politics is a serious threat** to democracy, human rights and gender equality (Krook, 2018).

3.29   **Inaccessibility of knowledge or resources can disproportionately impact people with PCs when engaging in politics**. Accessibility might be an issue for people in public spaces, including schools, workplaces and community groups. For example, technical or overly complicated language can be a barrier:

'…it's the language around actually accessing politics…in terms of for people for whom English is a second or third language, then they also deal with that extra barrier…as well from a disability perspective, for some neuro-divergent people as well, language can be quite impenetrable.'

(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.30   A study on political education in the UK found that failure to provide adequate education is found to contribute toward **low levels of awareness and understanding of political processes** (Weinberg, 2020). Political education plays a vital role in democratic participation (Kiess, 2021), with school being a particularly important institution for political socialisation (Torney-Purta, 2002; Quintelier and Hooghe, 2013; Pfanzelt and Spies, 2019). Education equips people with the intellectual readiness to engage in politics (Pfanzelt and Spies, 2019), particularly through developing strong verbal skills (Condon, 2015) and other assets beneficial for political engagement. Evidence indicates that low levels of political education are prevalent across a number of marginalised groups, including the LGBTQI+ community (Ryrie et al., 2010), disabled people (Agran et al., 2016), and both the oldest and youngest demographics (Blackwell et al., 2019).

3.31   Linked to low awareness levels, **disengagement from political processes and institutions** is another barrier for some under-represented groups. Grassroots political activism and engagement is an important route to candidacy (McCracken et al., 2019), so disengagement from these types of activity is a risk to representation of candidates from non-traditional pathways.

3.32   There was a sense amongst workshop participants that trust in politicians is low, and that some parts of the public feel distant from decision-making processes. Trust is an essential component of maintaining and strengthening political institutions (Kołczyńska, 2020). Various studies from Western Europe have demonstrated the strong correlation between education and political trust (Kołczyńska, 2020). The practice of democracy in educational institutions, including schools and universities, increases trust in political institutions (Kiess, 2021).

3.33   **Limited access to relevant experiences and education** is a barrier for some people with PCs. Education is a significant driver of political knowledge and democratic participation (Kiess, 2021), and higher education is a key stage for developing skills required for participation in formal politics (Perrin and Gillis, 2019).

However, higher education is less accessible to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and with other politically under-represented identities (Perrin and Gillis, 2019). Workshop participants discussed the inequality of private versus state-funded education as a barrier for children from less socio-economically advantaged backgrounds:

> 'In public schools, there is quite a lot of political education already about the system and how it works…I think the one thing they do teach is the expectation, almost the entitlement, that 'the world is mine to lead', but I think there is something about having that expectation shared, and not only in [public] schools...'

(Participant, Workshop 1: Policy Officials)

3.34 Some careers feed into politics, including law, business, education and political activism (Thomsen and King, 2020). But **for people from non-traditional professions, the political career path is less accessible.** Therefore, the pool of politicians and elected members is likely to be invariable in terms of career background.

Outcomes

3.35 The outcomes that were discussed at the workshops related to four groups: people with protected characteristics (PCs), elected members, local government and society. The overall outcome was agreed amongst policy officials, stakeholders and the researchers as: **local government is representative of the communities it serves.**

People with protected characteristics

3.36 The desired outcomes for people with PCs put forward by workshop participants were that they will be **confident** in the ability of their local representative to advocate for them and their interests:

'[Politics should be] a space where people [with PCs] feel and identify that their issues have been considered.'

(Participant, Workshop 1: Policy Officials)

Also, that they will be **engaged** with and **informed** about politics. They will be **respected** by their community as active citizens and will feel valued for the political and social experiences and contributions they provide:

'Welsh people can flourish, in a safe, healthy and engaged manner'

(Participant, Workshop 3: Local Government Officials)

Elected members

3.37 As a result of the intervention, elected members will be **accessible** to all people in their community and **engaged** with them, including people with PCs. They will be held properly **accountable** for their actions and political conduct and face consequences for behaviour that contradicts the diversity agenda:

'I think that the diversity and representation is important because it's part of that mechanism of accountability…it is fundamentally about having a functional, accountable government which is able to deliver a fair and open society'

(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.38 They will be sufficiently **trained** and equipped to make informed decisions on behalf of people with PCs, giving thorough consideration to the impact of those decisions. As an elected group of people, they will be **representative of their communities**, and more of them will have PCs. They will be **trusted** by the electorate, particularly people with PCs, to represent them and their interests.

Local government

3.39 Local governments will be **representative** of the communities they serve. They will be accessible to and inclusive of people with PCs. They will be fully and equally supportive of elected members with PCs. Local government will be an **attractive place to work** for people with PCs and being an elected member in local government will be considered a desirable job that people with PCs aspire to. Local government and its practices will be **fully democratic** and free of institutional bias and discrimination:

'…it's how decisions are made about how resources will be used for the greatest societal good, to take account of needs and weigh up challenges in an inclusive way.'

(Participant, Workshop 1: Policy Officials)

As an institution, it will lead on collaborative working between government, communities and organisations to deliver positive outcomes for people with PCs. Local government will create a **culture of respect**, where all voices can be heard and valued.

Society

3.40 Society in Wales will be **cohesive** and welcoming for everyone, valuing diversity and the skills and experiences that people with PCs have. Society will be **equitable**; resources will be distributed fairly and access to opportunities will be available to all:

'Society…is functioning a kind of fair and open way, which…doesn't prejudice anyone, but also allows people to pursue the opportunities in life they want.'

(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

Society in Wales will be a **safe** place for people with PCs where they can live free of discrimination, abuse or harassment.

Outputs

3.41 The outputs refer to tangible results that could be used to measure if and how the outcomes have been effectively achieved. The outputs were identified from workshop data by the IRP researchers. They fall into four categories: participation, representation, equality, and processes and mechanisms.

Participation

3.42 A key output relating to increasing representation in government is **a more diverse and informed candidate and member pool.** A representative pool of candidates is essential for healthy democracy from which voters can select members who represent their interests. The number of people leaving office will also reduce as **retention rates improve**. Workshop participants felt that this was especially important for people with protected characteristics (PCs), who are perceived to be more likely to drop out of local government elected roles due to the various barriers identified above.

'…retention amongst women elected representatives is not always great, particularly at local government level.'

(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.43   Participants pointed out that another important measurable output will be the **increased number of people with PCs, or from other under-represented groups, involved in political / civil engagement.** Modes of engagement that were suggested during workshops included political education, party membership, activism, candidacy, signing petitions and standing in office.

It was argued by participants that a determinant of successful and diverse democracy is an **increase in voter turnout**, as people across all socio-demographic groups feel more engaged with the political system. This was particularly relevant for people with PCs and other under-represented groups, who may be encouraged by more diversity amongst candidates on the ballot paper.

Representation

3.44   As a result of increased participation across the spectrum, it was logically assumed by workshop participants that, post-intervention, there will be **proportional, descriptive representation amongst elected members.** One participant suggested that full representation of the population in elected positions would help to alleviate the need for elected members with PCs working overtime in order to 'prove' themselves.

3.45   It was also argued that, where appropriate, legislative change should be undertaken to ensure that **laws are representative** and that the interests of all people, including those with PCs, are safeguarded. This may, for example, relate to the use of certain mechanisms (e.g., quotas) or the collection and publication of certain diversity data (e.g., party membership and seniority).

3.46   Likewise, participants felt that public services delivered by local government should meet the needs of their local populations. Thus, having **representative public services** is another output. This was understood to mean that the planning and delivery of services that directly affect people with PCs is undertaken at a local level, with individuals from the community involved in decision making to ensure that services are needs-based.

Equality

3.47   If the treatment of elected members improves, both publicly and institutionally, there should be **fewer reports of discrimination, harassment or abuse.** This would extend to instances of abuse on social media, hate crimes against elected members

and discrimination in selection processes. Whilst the ultimate goal would be zero incidences of these behaviours, it was felt that this might be unrealistic.

3.48   Participants thought that one measure of an equitable society would be **proportionate distribution of resources.** The equal allocation of resources could be specific, such as needs-based funding for political campaigns of people with PCs, or broader, such as the distribution of funding and resource to different community groups or local areas.

Processes and mechanisms

3.49   To create an accessible environment and process to elected office, **supporting information** needs to be available for prospective and existing candidates. The information itself needs to be accessible; one example provided by a workshop participant was having appropriate website design.

3.50   An **ethical framework** in which all political bodies are required to operate within is required to ensure consistency and fairness across the board. Likewise, **more instances of collaborative working** across sectors can act as a catalyst for efficient delivery of diversity in government.

3.51   **Robust and transparent monitoring data** must be available to track progress in terms of descriptive representation, evaluation of any intervention, and identifying areas for improvement.

3.52   Participants highlighted the need for effective mechanisms and appropriate sanctions for non-compliance and unfair practice withing local government, political parties and relevant organisations. These mechanisms could be encapsulated under an **accountability framework** that is properly adhered to and utilised to ensure best practice is adopted.

Activities

3.53   Activities are defined as the actions that can be supported or undertaken to convert inputs into desired outputs. Future process evaluations may focus on the items outlined in this section to assess intervention delivery and identify any areas in which implementation could be improved. Prior to delivery, each activity should also have a clear set of tangible output measures against which performance may be evaluated.

3.54   Activities in this section were collated from research conducted in the development of evidence reviews, alongside findings from both internal and external stakeholder workshops. The following four broad categories of activity were evident from the research: support candidates and elected members; improve public awareness of local government; improve the evidence base for policymakers; and assess the role of local government.

Support candidates and elected members

3.55   Among the most common themes to emerge from the research were those pertaining to candidate and member support. It was felt strongly by participants that measures to **address abuse, harassment, bullying and discrimination** were essential for supporting people with PCs. A zero-tolerance approach was endorsed:

> 'I think really tackling that, having that environment, and helping change culture is really, really important … if you want to encourage more diversity, you really have to sort of have a shift on that culture. So no, no answers as to how to do that to apart from zero tolerance.'

> (Participant, Workshop 3: Local Government Officials)

3.56   To address issues around campaign safety, participants recommended a central provision for campaign safety companions. There were also calls for further regulations on communications targeted toward candidates; this could be achieved with guidelines around social media use or a framework to sanction users for abusive behaviour toward representatives (Sobieraj and Jackson, 2020; House of Commons Petitions Committee, 2022). Protection and accountability measures were felt to be necessary to ensure that any action was effective.

3.57   Participants also highlighted the need for candidates and members to be protected against false statements, particularly those relating to negative stereotypes associated with PCs. Suggested measures included a centralised **code of conduct** for all people engaged with the political process:

> 'In terms of what I mean by institutional protection, you know, if you've been elected as a member of Welsh Parliament, I think there should be a very robust framework for how that person can deal with accusations which are slanderous, libellous, or in other ways inflammatory'

> (Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.58   At the party level, processes dealing with complaints of discrimination or abuse need to be implemented consistently and transparently. It was felt that sufficient resource and training of all staff is essential in achieving this, as is the modernisation of existing guidance.

3.59   **Facilitating support networks** was proposed as a way of ensuring that all candidates and elected members have access to a more comprehensive range of support and advice. It was felt that networks facilitate the sharing of experience and resources, while also enabling the establishment of valuable professional contacts:

'There's not enough infrastructure. And I'm not saying that's, you know, something that Welsh Government can just sort out or fix because it is a wider issue. But in terms of putting some things in place, like networks of support so that people actually have places to go and places to be able to get resources'

(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.60   It was noted that access to existing support is primarily granted through political party membership and therefore steps should be taken to **improve access to support for independent candidates and elected members**. In doing so, it was suggested that the inclusion of people with PCs would be improved, particularly where their interests are not represented by any of the major political parties. Such support may include the provision of reasonable adjustments, campaign resources, advice and guidance, consistent with that which is available to members of major parties.

3.61   Workshop participants felt that introducing more **flexible working practices** would hugely support elected members with PCs. Suggestions included having options for remote working and hybrid working:

'Having these meetings online has been really advantageous because, you know, they don't need to worry about needing someone to support the person they care for, if that's what they need. But then again, it's always a balanced approach that for other people it's meant it has been completely unacceptable.'

(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)

3.62   Job sharing was another suggestion for enabling a greater diversity of people to work as an elected member. Indeed, the literature suggests that job sharing can remove barriers related to employment, disability and caring responsibilities

(Brothers et al., 2017; Owen, 2021). It was also noted that job sharing is already permitted for members of the local Cabinet Executive in Wales and argued that extending to local government would benefit elected members.

3.63   Participants discussed the need for **ongoing support** from a range of organisations, including local authorities, political parties, and independent agencies such as the Electoral Commission. As one participant stated:

> 'I think there needs to be more about making sure there is an absolute standard of support for Members, that every Council has to provide and that is adequately funded.'

> (Participant, Workshop 3: Local Government Officials)

An example of how this could be delivered is through the provision of reasonable adjustments[3] to ensure that all candidates and members have equal access to a certain standard of support irrespective of individual party or local authority budgets.

3.64   Recommendations were made for **providing centrally managed resources to support the day-to-day role of elected members**, such as printing or support with social media. It was felt this would be particularly beneficial for candidates and members without prior relevant professional experience, people with cognitive impairments, and people whose first language was not English or Welsh.

3.65   To address bias against candidates and elected members with PCs, **delivering essential diversity and inclusion training** for all elected members was suggested. Training for members who enter local government through non-traditional routes could be implemented to develop role-specific skills, such as communication, negotiation, and effective decision making (Campbell, 2018; Buczkowska and Elmusharaf, 2021; National Council on Independent Living, 2022).

3.66   Participants suggested regular **review of councillor salary and benefits** to ensure that remuneration is appropriate for the responsibilities and requirements of office. To ensure that talent and expertise is not lost to other sectors, participants argued that elected members would need to be paid a wage that reflects their commitments

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[3] Changes to a process or physical feature to ensure that disabled people are not at a substantial disadvantage to non-disabled people.

and does not necessitate significant financial sacrifice when compared to alternative options of employment.

3.67 **Provision to cover caring costs and other support for carers** would assist elected members with caring responsibilities in carrying out their role. Noted to disproportionately affect female and elderly candidates, participants suggested a caring allowance be made available for candidates with dependents. This, it was proposed, would be provided to candidates irrespective of PCs, to ensure that all individuals with dependents were able to participate equally.

3.68 Throughout the workshops, participants highlighted areas in which people with PCs were at a financial disadvantage. Action was called to **provide financial support for those with additional costs relating PCs**. The existing Access to Elected Office Fund (A2EOF) was widely praised, and it was thought that extending this fund, as well as developing similar funding schemes for addressing barriers associated with other PCs, would be beneficial.

3.69 **Providing candidates and elected members with PCs the opportunity to be mentored by and shadow more experienced colleagues** would give them exposure to how elected office operates. Different approaches were discussed by workshop participants; some expressed a preference for matching mentors and mentees based on shared characteristics. Evidence reviews highlighted a number of cases in which mentorship schemes had been successfully targeted toward certain marginalised groups, including the Fabian Women's Network mentorship scheme (Campbell and Lovenduski, 2016; Campbell, 2018) and the ParliaMentors programme (Faith and Belief Forum, 2022).

3.70 It was proposed by one participant to **introduce co-opting practices** whereby individuals or organisations representative of minority groups could contribute toward decision making processes. It was mentioned that this could be done with a view to the individual standing for election themselves after gaining experience.

3.71 **Introducing diversity strategies and targets** could enable local governments to systematically take steps towards achieving representation of all PCs. Targets and quotas were central to discussions in each of the workshops. Participants were generally in favour of voluntary quota use, particularly with regards to gender. However, it was acknowledged that implementing quotas can be a complex process.

The use of quotas was seen to be a short-term measure to compliment longer-term solutions:

> 'I certainly would not see quotas as a forever thing. They should be a short-term blunt instrument to make sure that every political party takes this issue seriously and deals with the issues. We reach a point then, hopefully, where those barriers and biases have been dealt with, and then diversity of representation sustains itself.'

<div align="right">(Participant, Workshop 2: Equalities Representatives)</div>

Improve public awareness of local government

3.72 To address the issues surrounding a lack of understanding about the role of local government and elected members, activities focused on improving public awareness were suggested by workshop participants.

3.73 **Providing accessible information about the role of elected members and available support when standing for office** was thought to be key in changing public perceptions. Information on selection, candidacy and election could be provided by political parties and local councils. Sharing information with people from non-traditional backgrounds was felt to be particularly useful in reducing the perception that elected office 'isn't for them'.

3.74 As well as the role of elected members, it is important for people to understand the role of local government in society. As such, **raising awareness of local government** - what it does and how - would improve public understanding. The value of representation amongst elected members should also be emphasised to the public; this could help to break down misconceptions about people with PCs and reduce bias against candidates and elected members with PCs.

3.75 To do this, **engagement events** could be facilitated to promote the role of elected office to a wider range of people. Showcasing the development opportunities that come with being an elected member could form an important element of such events to educate people about the benefits of working in local government:

> '…we don't do enough to promote the positive aspects of being a councillor…it's a fantastic development opportunity…people get skills in sharing meetings, dealing with complaints, dealing with difficult people, taking personal responsibility.'

3.76   The types of engagement events suggested by participants included council open days, party recruitment drives, targeted community engagement events, partnerships with non-governmental organisations, and public consultation through select committees or panels. These activities were seen as fundamental to raising awareness in certain communities and to the development of relationships between local communities and their representatives. In terms of delivering events, participants largely focused on institutions at the heart communities, such as places of worship, education and work.

3.77   In addition to raising awareness amongst the public, it was thought that raising the profile of councillors to employers could be beneficial. Participants indicated that employers were largely unaware of how employees could benefit from undertaking a political role, for example, through the development of management, communication, and problem-solving skills.

3.78   When creating materials intended for the general public, it was felt important to ensure that language is accessible to people with different PCs and jargon is avoided.

3.79   **Engagement through education** settings was seen as important to including a diversity of young people, with the Politics Project given as a successful example[4]. Educating children in schools about how politics will affect them throughout their lives was suggested. There was an emphasis on reducing the psychological distance between young people and politics by encouraging early participation. It was acknowledged that this is a 'generational' process and that any impact from educational interventions would not likely be evident in the short-term.

> '[politics is] seen as part of their community lives and that they understand from a very early age that they are active citizens, that we've all got a role to play… the younger we can start, the more we can embed this into our education environment, the more we are going to achieve.'

(Participant, Workshop 1: Policy Officials)

3.80   Evidence from the literature supported teaching political subjects as part of the core curriculum, with a study into the teaching of politics in British schools concluding that

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[4] Digital surgeries

political education can improve attitudes toward engagement, expressive participation, and anticipated future participation in democratic exercises (Weinberg, 2020). While the report noted that formal political education was peripheral in many schools, workshop participants indicated that there was a provision gap between public and private schools, and that closing this gap could increase political aspiration among certain pupils.

3.81   It was also considered important to extend the educational offer beyond schools and **provide educational opportunities to people outside the mainstream education system.** A participant in the policy officials' workshop noted that work was already beginning in Wales to address this:

> 'What we're starting to do is to reach out to groups that are outside of the school setting as well. So that might be more engagement with people who are possibly less engaged with the formal education process.'

> (Participant, Workshop 1: Policy Officials)

Improve the evidence base for policymakers

3.82   Various activities to gather evidence were proposed. Participants acknowledged that some data is currently available through candidate and councillor surveys but noted that there are issues with low response rates, lack of legal enforcement and reluctance to provide personal data about PCs. It was therefore suggested that political parties and government work to encourage greater survey participation among elected members, highlighting the value of providing diversity information.

3.83   Improved data collection and reporting was recommended around the use of diversity initiatives. Participants discussed the need to **collect monitoring data for the purposes of evaluation** of diversity measures to ensure that they are effective. Where data collection is already in place, participants discussed the use of standardised measures linked to outcomes to allow for consistency and comparability.

3.84   **Conducting further research to plug evidence gaps** would improve the existing evidence base for policymakers, allowing them to make better-informed decisions. The topic of diversity in representation in academia is still quite new. For some PCs, the knowledge base is relatively developed (e.g., gender related studies), but this research may lack a local or contemporary context while studies into the efficacy of

solutions are still scarce. Furthermore, little exploration has been done into the effects of intersectionality. Although certain areas of research are growing, particularly relating to race and gender, intersectionality in all of its permutations is still largely unexplored and poorly understood.

3.85 Participants called for action to **develop analytical capacity** across political organisations. The aim of this would be to increase knowledge and understanding about the importance of high-quality data, robust analysis, and the application of findings to support evidence-based decision making. They suggested that Welsh Government could provide a supportive role in delivering data workshops to interested parties, using the opportunity to help embed an evidence-based culture and promote survey participation among future candidates.

Assess the role of local government

3.86 The role of local government in Wales also needs to be considered in meeting the main outcome that local government itself is representative. To do this, there needs to be **shared learning and knowledge** from examples of good practice both in the UK and internationally. To make sure that there is as much opportunity for people with PCs to enter elected office as possible, measures could be introduced to **prevent incumbency**, such as term limits and succession planning.

3.87 Political parties need to be supported to ensure that campaign processes are inclusive and accessible for people with PCs. Selection processes also need regular reviewing, to ensure that competition is fair and transparent for all prospective candidates. Areas for improvement throughout these processes should also be identified and addressed.

Inputs

3.88 The inputs column in the logic model looks at what resources are needed to effect change. For evaluation, this part of the ToC informs the assessment of whether the inputs required met expectations (HM Treasury, 2020). The inputs can also inform cost-benefit analyses. The inputs presented here were drawn and developed from workshop data.

People

3.89 A major requirement for the success of the ToC is having **people with relevant expertise**, including politics, media, youth engagement, community engagement and

equalities. As the policy developers, **Welsh Government officials** were considered essential to taking forward any intervention aimed at progressing diversity in local government. Likewise, **local government resources** are needed to focus on democratic engagement, supporting political aspirants, candidates, and elected members.

3.90 Participants emphasised the important role that **political party leaders** play in shaping attitudes and championing diversity within their parties. It was felt that ultimately it was parties' responsibility to enact any real change:

> 'it's up to parties to select and encourage selection...all we can do is create an environment and process as accessible, as easy, as non-restrictive, with supporting information around it.'

> (Participant, Workshop 1: Policy Officials)

3.91 Some participants also drew attention to the fact that some parties more actively pursue equality and diversity goals than others. Additionally, it was suggested that there are differences in levels of support for the diversity agenda across Wales; some areas are more proactive, and this was not thought to be party-specific.

Organisations

3.92 As well as individual experts, **organisations were identified as being important players in supporting and facilitating change**. Such organisations suggested by participants included political parties, local authorities, local councils, Welsh Government, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and third-sector bodies supporting people with PCs and other under-represented groups.

Funding

3.93 Funding was identified as necessary for achieving the ToC outcomes. Areas in which **financial resource** would be required were highlighted by participants and include education, community outreach / engagement and local government administration. Participants also suggested that funding will be needed for **programmes, schemes and events** aimed at raising awareness and recruiting potential candidates from a wide range of backgrounds, as well as for **administration** of these interventions.

Assumptions

3.94 All ToC are underpinned by assumptions about how the intervention or policy is intended to function (HM Treasury, 2020). The researchers identified the underlying assumptions through analysis of the workshop transcripts. The key assumptions are that:

- People with protected characteristics (PCs) want to be more engaged with local government

- People and organisations are able and willing to support significant change

- People with PCs will want to participate in politics with the right support and information

- Descriptive representation will lead to substantive representation

- Substantive representation will result in improved wellbeing and greater equality on a societal level

3.95 Additional assumptions that were identified include:

- That inclusivity in participative democracy is important for overall democratic health

- Increased diversity in local government will improve community cohesion

- Political education at schools is important for embedding democratic understanding across all socio-demographic groups

- Visible diversity amongst candidates within local and national government will increase political aspiration for people with PCs and other under-represented groups

- Current ways of working in local government are incompatible with achieving full accessibility for people from all backgrounds

3.96 These assumptions can be tested using evaluation methods during the implementation and delivery of any future intervention or policy.

Risks

3.97 The risks identified by workshop participants can be grouped into the following areas: risks to delivery, risks to sustainability, risks to uptake and retention, and risks to achieving the outcomes.

Risks to delivery

3.98 Numerous risks to delivery were raised throughout each of the workshops, including **a lack of buy-in from political organisations, elected members or underrepresented communities**. Motivations may be negatively influenced by previous experiences or pre-conceptions of equality and diversity outcomes, such as positive discrimination, such that there is insufficient support in implementing any intervention/policy. The **complexity** of issues such as intersectionality can create difficulties in developing strategies to overcome barriers to political participation. The ability to achieve the outcomes within the logic model is dependent on many organisations working together; **organisations have limited capacity to affect societal change when operating in silo**.

3.99 The impact of **limited resources** was also identified as posing a risk to delivery. Successful delivery will require significant time, resource and financial commitments, but most bodies operate within budgets and have existing priorities. Moreover, the **risk-averse culture within public bodies** could prevent organisations from making any significant changes. Yet, organisations will need to become more accommodating and adaptable to achieve the outcomes set out in the logic model.

3.100 The implementation of certain elements of any intervention / policy may require change to current law or fall beyond the remit of the Welsh Government (for example, introducing legally binding quotas). Therefore, **legal restrictions** may hinder the delivery process. Lastly, participants expressed concern that **conflict between organisations, communities or political groups** could pose a risk to collaborative working and thus delivery.

Risks to sustainability

3.101 As the make-up of the population changes with time, so too will the needs of those in underrepresented groups and the barriers faced toward political participation. It was felt by participants that **changing demographics could mean that the intervention becomes outdated or unsuitable to meet the needs of all communities**.

3.102   Other risks to achieving a sustainable policy are **short-termism** and **election cycles**. Participants perceived a tendency for policymakers to favour short-term outcomes, which may influence how success is measured. Motivation and momentum for change may also wane over time. The timing of implementation / delivery may be disrupted by election cycles, while new administrations and members may favour different priorities, approaches, or ways of working.

Risks to uptake and retention

3.103   Participants felt that a **lack of awareness of diversity initiatives or the need for change** could lead to fewer members and organisations taking part in the intervention/policy. This could cause a lack of uptake of initiatives and wasted resource. Additionally, **poor collaboration** between delivery partners may result in a low-quality service or create gaps in service provision.

3.104   It was also thought that **public perceptions of groups or individuals with protected characteristics (PCs)** could negatively impact on uptake and retention rates, both in terms of diversity of the member pool and for partaking organisations.

3.105   Tokenism was also discussed as a risk to participation; if delivery is not fully committed to or outcomes are not as desired, any actions may be seen as performative or tokenistic**.**

Risks to achieving outcomes

3.106   If there is **a lack of engagement from key organisations, representatives or communities,** the outcomes are less achievable. Long-term interventions may not demonstrate immediate or significant impact, which could mean that communities and delivery partners are discouraged and less likely to actively participate and engage.

3.107   Workshop participants recognised that elected members with PCs often feel that they sense more pressure to succeed compared with other members. As such, there is **a risk of disenfranchisement if a poor 'role model' is elected and misrepresents their communities**, for example, by becoming embroiled in a public scandal. Others with PCs may be deterred from political participation as a result, rendering the outcomes unachievable.

Data

3.108 Workshop participants were asked about measuring progress and outcomes. Various data sources were suggested and are summarised in Table 2 (below). The broader discussion around data highlighted the **need for fuller and more robust data** to monitor change over time. It was argued that data needs to be easily accessible to a range of audiences. Information on the demographics of people who are potential candidates but do not end up running for election should also be considered. Participants emphasised that political parties play an important role in collecting, recording and publishing equality and diversity data in order to identify issues relating to under-representation of some groups.

Table 2: Suggested sources for monitoring data

Data source	Potential indicators
Candidate survey - Data Unit Wales	Stratified demographic information of councillors: • By type of council (county/town/ community) • By political party (including independents) Demographic data collected by the survey: • Age • Religion • Sex • Gender • Caring responsibilities • Ethnicity • Sexual orientation • Welsh language abilities • Education history • Employment status • Disability
Data Cymru	Local government staff demographics: • Gender • Age • Working hours
Democratic Services Committees	Type of support accessed by councillors, by local authority Number of activities undertaken to promote local democracy, by local authority
Disability Wales	Number of disabled people accessing the A2EOF Number of people with A2EOF support who become elected Type of support accessed as part of the A2EOF
Local councils - National Survey Wales	Relevant National Well-being Indicators: • Percentage of people who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area • Percentage of people agreeing that:

a) they belong to the area

b) people from different backgrounds get on well together

c) people treat each other with respect

- Rates of digital inclusion

Local Government and Housing Committee	Implementation of the Diversity in Democracy Action Plan (2020) items
One Voice Wales	Number of training courses undertaken by councillors Feedback on training courses by learners
Political parties	Demographic data of party representatives / candidates
Politics Project	Number and type of youth engagement activities Effectiveness of youth engagement activities Young people's attitudes to politics Engagement level Knowledge level
Public Services Boards (PSBs)	Implementation data of Local Well-being Plan objectives
UK Census - ONS	Demographic data, by local area
Senedd Commission	Demographic data of Welsh Youth Parliament members Number of activities undertaken to support diversity in government

4. Discussion

Contextual observations

4.1 It is evident that protected characteristics (PCs), their associated barriers to representation, and solutions to overcome them are complex. Even within individual PC groups, Equality Act 2010 definitions often cover a range of diverse traits, each with their distinct challenges and needs. For example, the term 'disability' covers physical, mental, and emotional conditions, all of which vary by nature and severity. Interventions targeted at people with PCs should therefore ensure that all traits encompassed within the term are addressed and that benefit is equally accessible to all.

4.2 The findings drawn from the primary data and evidence reviews allow some broad generalisations to be made, such as people with PCs experience more barriers to elected office than those without. However, the type of support that is needed to achieve equality of outcome is dependent on individuals' circumstances. For example, the literature indicates that disabled people are more likely to be financially disadvantaged than their non-disabled peers, but this is not true in every instance. As such, it would be inappropriate to assume the wants and needs of an individual based exclusively on their characteristics. The decision to accept support should be the prerogative of the individual, and flexibility should be inbuilt to the different types of support available to accommodate diversity of need.

4.3 Intersectionality, or the interconnection of two or more PCs, compounds the need for these types of consideration. Although research in this area is still in its infancy, current literature suggests that people subject to intersecting areas of disadvantage may face both distinct and more severe obstacles (Evans, 2016; Mügge and Erzeel, 2016). Moreover, existing research focuses predominantly on the intersection between two or more characteristics (e.g., gender and race) and not intersection within a single characteristic (e.g., both physical and mental disability, or identification with multiple ethnicities).

4.4 Although this report identifies areas of commonality across PCs, intersectionality itself is not explored. As such, further research is required to fully understand the implications of intersectionality on standing for elected office. Strategies for intervention should be receptive to any unique or additional obstacles faced by those

identifying with multiple PCs. This is also true of other areas of collective disadvantage not covered under the Equality Act 2010, such as socio-economic status.

The political pipeline

4.5   The barriers raised in chapter 3 of this report apply at different and multiple stages of life. This mechanism is sometimes referred to as the 'political pipeline', which describes the process from citizen to politician (Gomes et al., 2021). The pipeline can be broken down into four distinct life stages according to the barriers identified by the data collected for this report: early years; youth and young adulthood; adulthood; and older age. The pipeline is useful in terms of planning and prioritising where interventions might have the greatest impact.

Figure 3: Political pipeline life stages

4.6   The first stage, 'early years', incorporates the period of birth to teenager, where immediate family and school are particularly influential. This period of life is crucial for socialisation through the political pipeline, as everyday interactions signal societal beliefs and attitudes around political leadership to children (Heck et al., 2021). Unconscious biases are formed in this life stage as social norms concerning politics influence children from a very young age; these early messages can either support or erode a child's self-confidence and perception of their suitability for political leadership (Heck et al., 2021).

4.7   Attitudes, beliefs and experiences around politics are developed in young childhood with significant influence from intersectionality and cross-cultural context (Heck et al., 2021). This stage is important in determining later life outcomes, not only in running for candidacy but for political participation more generally, as research has shown that political education and awareness in the home shapes adults' political attitudes and behaviour (Fox and Lawless, 2014).

4.8   The role of the school is also hugely influential on shaping the political pipeline. As workshop participants in this research noted, the type of education that a child

receives can determine whether or not they have the skills required for a career in politics. The notion that schools play an important role in developing civic understanding is supported in research (see Kiess, 2021).

4.9 The second stage, 'youth and young adulthood', includes teenage years through to early twenties, when many young people are furthering their education and making decisions about their careers. The role of further and higher education on political engagement has been found to be significant. One of the reasons for this is thought to be the democratic principles exercised in further and higher education, which build trust in the political system (Kiess, 2021).

4.10 The choices that young people make about their careers also affect the likelihood of standing for elected office in the future. Certain degrees and careers shape the occupational pipeline into politics (Gomes et al., 2021), because some are more aligned with the skills required for public office than others. Sectors that lend themselves more towards a future political career include law, business, education and political activism (Thomsen and King, 2020).

4.11 Other variables determining inclusion into the political pipeline at this stage include early party affiliation, union participation, activism and exposure to political networks (Gomes et al., 2021). Research has found that experiences of competition in earlier life promote an openness to running for political office (Fox and Lawless, 2014), and opportunities to 'compete' may be more abundant for young people who attend university than those who do not.

4.12 Moreover, individualised forms of political engagement are important for young people (Pfanzelt and Spies, 2019), particularly where they have feelings of disillusion, disappointment and distrust towards politicians (Pickard, 2019). These more individualised methods often take place via social media (Pickard, 2019) and can equip young people with civic skills and increase political interest (Fox and Lawless, 2014). This is important for this stage of the political pipeline, as research shows that political engagement is likely to continue from youth to adulthood where children are given the knowledge and skills to take action on political issues (Funk and Philips, 2019).

4.13 Role models are also key for young people to see that politics is 'for them'. In terms of diversity and representation, elected members with similar characteristics can help the political arena to be perceived as more accessible. For example, women in

senior political positions send the message to younger women that a leadership career in politics is possible (White and Mariani, 2015).

4.14   The next stage, 'adulthood', is generally when people actively seek election into politics or become more engaged with traditional politics (see White and Mariani, 2015). As well as the choices people make when starting their careers, work experience is a hugely influential factor in accessing the political pipeline. For example, experience in local government can serve as an ideal beginning point for a career in national politics (White and Mariani, 2015).

4.15   Adulthood is also the time that people typically start families. The time and commitment required for raising children is substantial and a greater barrier for women than men, as women tend to be the primary caregivers (Farrell and Titcombe, 2016).

4.16   The final stage of the pipeline is 'older age', covering the period of retirement. A large proportion of councillors is of older people. Welsh local government reflects this trend; local councils in Wales are disproportionately made up of older and retired populations (Hibbs, 2022). There is also a gender imbalance of older men versus older women amongst local council candidates in Wales (Murphy and Jones, 2018). Retirement usually leads to having more free time (Ortak and Bulut, 2022), which lends itself to being able to stand as a councillor. As workshop participants noted, the demand on councillors' time is substantial so dedicating time to the councillor role is easier if the individual does not have another job.

5. Recommendations

This report has detailed the findings from research exploring a theory of change approach to overcoming barriers to elected office. The findings are illustrated in the logic model (pages 15 and 16), which focuses on the desired outcomes, outputs, activities and inputs necessary to achieve the overarching aim that local government is representative of the communities it serves.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Stakeholder engagement should continue throughout the development of any policy relating to increasing diversity in local government
2. A scoping exercise should be conducted to identify existing data sources suitable for providing demographic (and other relevant) information, and to test the credibility of the data
3. Identify gaps in the data / evidence and develop a strategy to ensure that monitoring data is:
   a) collected
   b) suitable for measuring progress towards key indicators
   c) inclusive of all candidates and members, including those who consider running for office and then choose not to
4. Policy officials should revisit the theory of change / logic model periodically to:
   a) test the assumptions underpinning any policy development
   b) make relevant updates, paying particular attention to how outcomes are expected to be achieved
   c) consider what additional risks may have arisen and how these can be monitored / mitigated
5. Use the theory of change to inform the evaluation of policies or programmes introduced by the Local Government Democracy division in terms of:
   a) data - collection and analysis
   b) measuring impact – key indicators and milestones
   c) evaluation planning – implementation review, mid-term review, final evaluation, budget and resource

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Annex A – Microsoft Whiteboard template with 'sticky notes' used in theory of change workshops