

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 24

Subject: Diverse Councils Declaration

Date of meeting: 20 July 2023

Report of: Executive Director Governance, People & Resources
Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods and
Communities

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

1.1 The Diverse Councils Declaration ('the Declaration') seeks to ensure that Councillors reflect the diversity of their community by committing to a number of pledges. This report recommends the Declaration to full Council for agreement.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Council agrees to sign up to the Diverse Councils Declaration as set out at Appendix 1.

3. Context and background information

3.1 The Diverse Councils Declaration has been developed by Baroness Debbie Wilcox of Newport, working with the Co-operative Party and local authorities in England and is attached at Appendix 1.

3.2 The cornerstone of the Declaration is to provide a clear public commitment to improving diversity in democracy. By signing up to the Declaration, Brighton & Hove City Council would be providing that public statement of intent.

3.3 The Declaration provides some helpful tools to assist the Council and Councillors to achieve its aims. Many of the actions in the Declaration are for Political Groups to take forward, such as committing to appointing Diversity Ambassadors, setting ambitious targets for candidates from under-represented groups at the next local elections and promoting the talent and diversity of colleagues through mentoring and shadowing.

3.4 Other elements of the Declaration can be promoted and supported by the Council. Signing up to the Charter will reaffirm the commitment to those actions and ensure that they are reviewed and can be built on. Many are already in place or underway. For example:-

- Equalities surveys of members are undertaken (point 3)
- Events for anyone interested in standing as a candidate are regularly delivered (point 3)
- the Council has attained the Charter Plus member development charter and has committed to retaining this accreditation (Point 4);
- the Council has delivered Personal Safety and Security Member Induction training (May 2023) (point 5);
- a free Counselling Service is available to all elected members (point 5);
- the Council timetable does include recess periods and supports remote attendance at meetings where this is legally compliant (point 6);
- a parental, carers and special leave policy for members is in place (point 8).

3.5 Further work can be undertaken to support the aims of the Declaration. Examples of such further steps which are highlighted through the Declaration could be:-

- Equalities surveys could extend to candidates in addition to elected members;
- Further work could be undertaken to review the Council timetable to review and stagger meeting times;
- Group Ambassadors could work with local community groups and partner organisations that support under-represented groups to encourage their democratic engagement, for example, through mentoring or shadowing;
- The Independent Remuneration Panel could be asked to ensure that their recommendations in their forthcoming review of Member Allowances include fair reimbursement for the costs of care.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

4.1 The Council is not required to sign up to the Declaration and could choose not to do so, however it is a public statement of commitment from the Council that it is ambitious to achieve a Council that represents the people it serves.

5. Community engagement and consultation

5.1 Community engagement has not been undertaken in relation to the Council signing up to this Pledge on the basis that it is a set of internal commitments for the Council and its Councillors to take forward. It is anticipated that, should the report be agreed, Councillors and their Group's Diversity Ambassadors will wish to engage with residents and community groups on the implementation of the Declaration.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Council is recommended to agree to sign up to the Declaration in order to promote the importance of and ambition to increase the diversity of Councillors in Local Government.

7. Financial implications

7.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendation of this report.

Name of finance officer consulted: James Hengeveld Date consulted (07/07/23):

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 There are no legal implications arising from the commitments set out in the Declaration. The Council and Councillors will continue to be advised to only undertake activity that complies with legal requirements and the Council's constitution and nothing in the Declaration would replace those overriding requirements.
- 8.2 Signing up to Charters or Pledges is a function reserved to full Council under the Council's Constitution.

Name of lawyer consulted: Elizabeth Culbert Date consulted 060723

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 The Council has a public sector equality duty under s149 of the Equality Act 2010. In the exercise of its functions the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act and must advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those that do not.

The proposals of this report are consistent with and directly support the Council having regard to its public sector equality duty.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 No sustainability impacts have been identified.

Supporting Documentation

Appendices

1. Diverse Councils Declaration

