

Diverse Councils Declaration

This Council commits to being a Diverse Council. We agree to:

1. Provide a clear public commitment to improving diversity in democracy.
2. Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all, promoting the highest standards of behaviour and conduct.
3. Set out a local Diverse Council Action Plan ahead of the next local elections. Including:
 - Appoint Diversity Ambassadors for each political group on the council to work with each other and local party associations to encourage recruitment of candidates from under-represented groups.
 - Encourage and enable people from under-represented groups to stand for office through the provision of activities such as mentoring and shadowing programmes and information and learning events for people interested in standing as official candidates.
 - Proactive engagement and involvement with local community groups and partner organisations supporting and representing under-represented groups
 - Ensure that all members and candidates complete a candidates' and councillors' survey distributed at election time.
 - Set ambitious targets for candidates from under-represented groups at the next local elections
4. Work towards the standards for member support and development as set out in the LGA Councillor Development Charter and/or Charter Plus.
5. Demonstrate a commitment to a duty of care for councillors by:
 - providing access to counselling services for all councillors
 - having regard for the safety and wellbeing of councillors whenever they are performing their role as councillors.
 - taking a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment of members including through social networks.
6. Provide flexibility in council business by regularly reviewing and staggering meeting times
 - encouraging and supporting remote attendance at meetings
 - agreeing recess periods to support councillors with caring or work commitments.
7. Ensure that all members take up the allowances and salaries to which they are entitled, particularly any reimbursement for costs of care, so that all members receive fair remuneration for their work and that the role of member is not limited to those who can afford it.
8. Ensure that the council adopts a parental leave policy setting out members' entitlement to maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave and relevant allowances.
9. Ensure that councillors from under-represented groups are represented whenever possible in high profile, high influence roles.

Foreword

Two of the key co-operative values are equality and democracy. I have been working with colleagues in the Co-operative Party and local authorities throughout England on a project to bring the success of the Welsh LGA to England. We have developed this Declaration for councils in England aimed at increasing diversity in local government.

Councillors represent their community. We want to ensure Councillors reflect the diversity of their community, particularly those with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation).

Our consultation revealed that whilst 96.2% of respondents felt that it is important for good decision making that our council reflects the diversity of our residents, less than half felt that their own authority was achieving this well enough at present. Recent figures show that 96% describe themselves as white, 88% as heterosexual or straight, 16% have a disability or long term condition, 36% have caring responsibilities and only 36% are female. There is a clear appetite and need for change.

I am proud to announce our new Diverse Councils Declaration. I hope you will take up this challenge, removing barriers standing in the way of a more diverse and inclusive democracy.

Baroness Debbie Wilcox of Newport

Implementation guidance

Each guidance point below corresponds to the equivalent numbered point from the Declaration, as found on the reverse. Further guidance will be available at party.coop/diversecouncils

1. This is the cornerstone to the Declaration. A statement to the community and clear lines of communication on progress with partners will be necessary to ensure that the council is truly representative of the community it serves.
2. There are several ways to enact this aspect, but our recommendation would be to take the steps outlined in the LGA Equality Framework for Local Government. The four improvement modules are on Understanding and working with your communities, Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment, Responsive services and customer care, and a Diverse and engaged workforce. Together, the Framework is a useful tool in achieving culture change.
3. Your Action Plan should set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time bound) goals and be reviewed regularly. Key milestones should include: Diversity Ambassador appointment, establishment of a mentoring and shadowing programme designed to reflect the needs of your specific community, running information and learning events for potential candidates, co-operative working with partners in the planning, promotion and delivery, a survey for candidates and councillors that has clear objectives and established actions based upon findings, and clear targets for the council to achieve at the next local election. This Action Plan should be reviewed upon completion.
4. Development for councillors is important in ensuring that councillors deliver. The LGA's Councillor Development Charter supports councils to enrich their councillor development programmes. The Framework enables councils to take a strategic approach to councillor development and support skills acquisition by councillors throughout the programme.
5. Care and well-being of elected members is an increasing area of focus in many local authorities. As well as supporting councillors through stressful and demanding tasks, options for achieving this include Mental Health First Aid training and free counselling services provided by local partners. Bullying and harassment has increased both in person and online. Women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ colleagues and those with disabilities are targeted at higher rates. Councils should adopt a zero-tolerance approach.
6. Many councillors take on elected responsibility alongside other commitments. The time commitment required to be a councillor can hold back those aspiring to serve. The recognition of this and flexible working widens opportunities. Women disproportionately are impacted by caring commitments, so flexibility in meeting times and opportunities for remote working allow more women to stand. Those with a disability or long-term condition can benefit from hybrid or remote working if mobility issues arise. Councils can achieve this by reviewing the current meeting times and seeking to diversify timings. This goes beyond seeing what works for current councillors, but must also take into consideration how the existing meeting times may deter those who might put themselves forward as candidates. Hybrid / remote working can accommodate busy schedules and mobility needs.
7. Fair remuneration is essential for anyone in work. The dedication required to be a councillor should be compensated proportionately. For those with caring responsibilities, councils should ensure that there is a dedicated policy for remuneration of care, so this is not a financial obstacle to participation.
8. Ensure council members can take appropriate leave at the time of birth or adoption, that both parents can take leave, and that adequate arrangements are in place to provide cover for all in receipt of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) during any period of leave.
9. The councillor development and support programme above will ensure a wide pool of talent. Councillors from under-represented groups should be encouraged to take on high profile roles. Mentorship and shadowing opportunities should be available to members to encourage individuals into senior roles. Councillors should promote the talent and diversity of colleagues so the council will visibly recognise all people in society.