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# New Voices

## How Welsh politics can begin to reflect Wales

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Jess Blair and  
Mat Mathias  
*July 2018*

We would like to thank a number of people for helping us with this report. Firstly, to the organisations who helped us develop our recommendations and shared our surveys to help us gather more data: Chwarae Teg, the Electoral Commission, Equality and Human Rights Commission, Disability Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association and WEN Wales.

A huge thanks to those who took part in our survey, to those who gave up their time for an interview with us and those members of the public who emailed us to tell us about their experiences.

Finally to those at the Electoral Reform Society who have helped us put together this report: Jess Garland, Doug Cowan, Chris Terry, Josiah Mortimer, Rob Cox, Lizzie Lawless and Michela Palese.

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# Foreword



Jess Blair,  
Director ERS Cymru

2018 is the year of the centenary of some women first being afforded the right to vote. We've come a long way in that 100 years, with our democracy radically shifting from that limited extension of voting eligibility, but despite this progress we haven't come far enough.

How diverse our elected representatives are is an issue that goes to the very heart of our democracy. It is vitally important that the people who represent us properly reflect us, whether that be through their gender, their ethnicity, their sexuality, their age, their socio economic background or a disability. If people don't see themselves in modern politics then we cannot blame them for being disengaged and frustrated with the way it is representing them.

Our story since devolution has often been hailed as a success. Owing to the use of All Women Shortlists and a strong focus by some of the political parties on equality, the National Assembly for Wales became the first legislature in the world to achieve 50:50 gender balance. Yet, since then we've slipped back. Currently 43% of AMs are women. Despite this the Assembly still has the best record of success of all the political institutions in Wales when it comes to gender equality.

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Just 32% of those currently elected to Parliament are women. The figure for Welsh MPs is lower at 27.5% and there has still never been a Conservative female MP elected in Wales.

At a local government level progress has also been slow. 28% of councillors in Wales are women. Two of Wales' 22 local authorities have no women at all in their cabinets.

When it comes to other demographic indicators the picture is less clear due to a paucity in official data but even without specific statistics it is clear we are not doing well. WEN Wales' *Equality for Women and Girls Manifesto*<sup>1</sup> highlighted the fact that the Welsh Assembly has never elected an ethnic minority woman.

For many people reading this, the data highlighted above will not be shocking. Quite frankly, we've heard a lot of this before.

So what this report aims to do is to bring the data and the stories together. We have wanted to dig behind the numbers and headlines and produce a report that is based on wider conversations with elected politicians, future candidates and those put off from standing all together.

We've used a combination of surveys to all elected representatives in Wales, interviews with key people in each party, social media campaigns and a roundtable with key equalities organisations in Wales to develop a piece of work that we hope has a greater understanding of what is stopping equality in our political institutions. With a greater understanding of the barriers we face we will have a better understanding of how we can overcome them.

Jess Blair  
Director, ERS Cymru

1. WEN Wales, 2018, Equality for Women and Girls in Wales: Our Manifesto, [https://www.cteg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/LR\\_11509-WEN-Manifesto-20pp-A4-English.pdf](https://www.cteg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/LR_11509-WEN-Manifesto-20pp-A4-English.pdf)

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# Recommendations

## Recommendation 1

Welsh Government should introduce a 45% quota for women for each party at local government elections, meaning that at least 45% of their candidates should be female.

## Recommendation 2

Measures should be put in place to encourage a broader range of candidates from ethnic minorities, age spread and those with disabilities alongside ways to monitor the development of this. As part of this each party should ask candidates to fill out an equalities monitoring form upon selection and every party should make the headline figures of their candidates public in a standardised format

to allow the progress of parties to be compared fairly. Each local authority should then publish a complete report of their makeup after each election.

## Recommendation 3

Council leaders should be held to account by Welsh Government if they fail to select councillors who are diverse for their leadership teams.

## Recommendation 4

Welsh Government should commission a review into councillor remuneration, which should include an analysis of the potential for fewer councillors at a higher salary.

## Recommendation 5

The UK Government should enact Section 106 of the Equality Act in time for the next General Election requiring all parties to publish equality data in a coherent and standardised format. At a Welsh level parties shouldn't wait for the next UK General Election and should collate this information for the next Assembly and local elections.

## Recommendation 6

The UK Government should legislate ensuring all parties have to field candidates made up of at least 45% women. Work should also be undertaken to review how to put in place measures to promote other diverse groups.



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**Recommendation 7**

Each political party should introduce an action plan on diversity to select candidates for vacant target seats at a Westminster level.

**Recommendation 8**

A proportional electoral system should be adopted for UK General Elections, to ameliorate problem of ‘seat blockers’ under Westminster’s system.

**Recommendation 9**

The National Assembly for Wales should implement all of the Expert Panel on Assembly Reform’s recommendations on gender parity by the next Assembly election.

**Recommendation 10**

Each party should look to field candidates from a more diverse background in the next Assembly elections, particularly female BAME candidates and those with disabilities.

**Recommendation 11**

The recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life that social media companies should develop automated techniques for identifying intimidatory behaviour and taking it down should be implemented. Social media companies should also offer tools for users to escalate reports of illegal online activity to the police.

**Recommendation 12**

The Welsh political parties should develop a joint code of conduct on intimidatory behaviour. Better training and guidance to candidates on social media abuse should also be offered, as was also recommended by the CSPL last year.

**Recommendation 13**

Better political education should be delivered in Welsh schools to begin to try and tackle the negative culture that is currently leading to a lot of the abuse we are seeing.

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### **Recommendation 14**

An assessment of the viability of a crèche at the National Assembly for Wales for use by Assembly Members and staff should be undertaken.

### **Recommendation 15**

Job sharing should become an option for politicians in every institution provided the proper arrangements are made.

### **Recommendation 16**

A review should be undertaken into how funding can be made available for candidates from a diverse background, which should consider the ‘Unpacking Diversity’ report’s recommendation of an ‘Access to Politics Fund’.

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# Methodology

This project has attempted to understand the barriers to achieving a more diverse democracy in Wales using a combined approach of qualitative and quantitative analysis in a number of formats.

These have included:

- A survey. We distributed a survey to elected representatives in Wales to establish information including gender, disability requirements, their age and their experiences of harassment in politics. We also launched a social media campaign asking people why they had been put off from standing.
- Case studies and interviews. To add depth to the project we wanted to undertake exclusive interviews with key people in Welsh politics about the barriers to having a more diverse democracy.
- Data analysis. We have collated and analysed data from sources which are publicly available. These include calculating the number of female politicians at each level of governance in Wales. Given the lack of formal statistics around candidates and elected representatives' diversity we have had to make some assumptions around gender, basing these

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- assumptions on names and images.
  - Literature review. A number of recent reports into diversity have been released and this report has looked at their findings in order to ensure our own are building on these. These include the Expert Panel on Assembly Reform's report *A Parliament that works for Wales, Unpacking diversity*, which was commissioned by the National Assembly for Wales' Remuneration Board and WEN Wales' *Our Manifesto*.
  - Roundtable. To develop our recommendations we brought together a meeting of key organisations in Wales where we shared our findings and discussed the best approach to improving the barriers we have uncovered. Participants in this session included representatives from Welsh Government, WLGA, Chwarae Teg, WEN Wales, Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Electoral Commission. A representative from the National Assembly for Wales attended the session as an observer.

## Survey

A full copy of our survey and responses (with confidential information not included) can be found here: <https://goo.gl/VKKr9K>

The survey was sent to all Welsh elected members at local authority, National Assembly for Wales and UK Parliamentary level in February 2018 and followed up by reminder emails in the subsequent months. There were 266 responses, 224 councillors, 26 AMs, 11 MPs and 1 MEP with 4 not stating the level of government they were elected to.

Out of the 265 who answered the question on which political party they belonged to stated the following:

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**Party breakdown of survey respondent**

Party	Number	Percentage [%]
Labour (Including Labour and Cooperative Party)	104	39.3
Plaid Cymru	75	28.3
Conservatives	37	14
Independent	32	12.2
Liberal Democrats	10	3.8
UKIP	1	0.4
Green	1	0.4
Other	1	0.4
Prefer not to say	4	1.5

## **Interviews**

As part of our series of interviews we spoke to eight politicians covering five parties and three levels of government.

A full transcript of each interview can be found here: <https://goo.gl/4tpXqT>

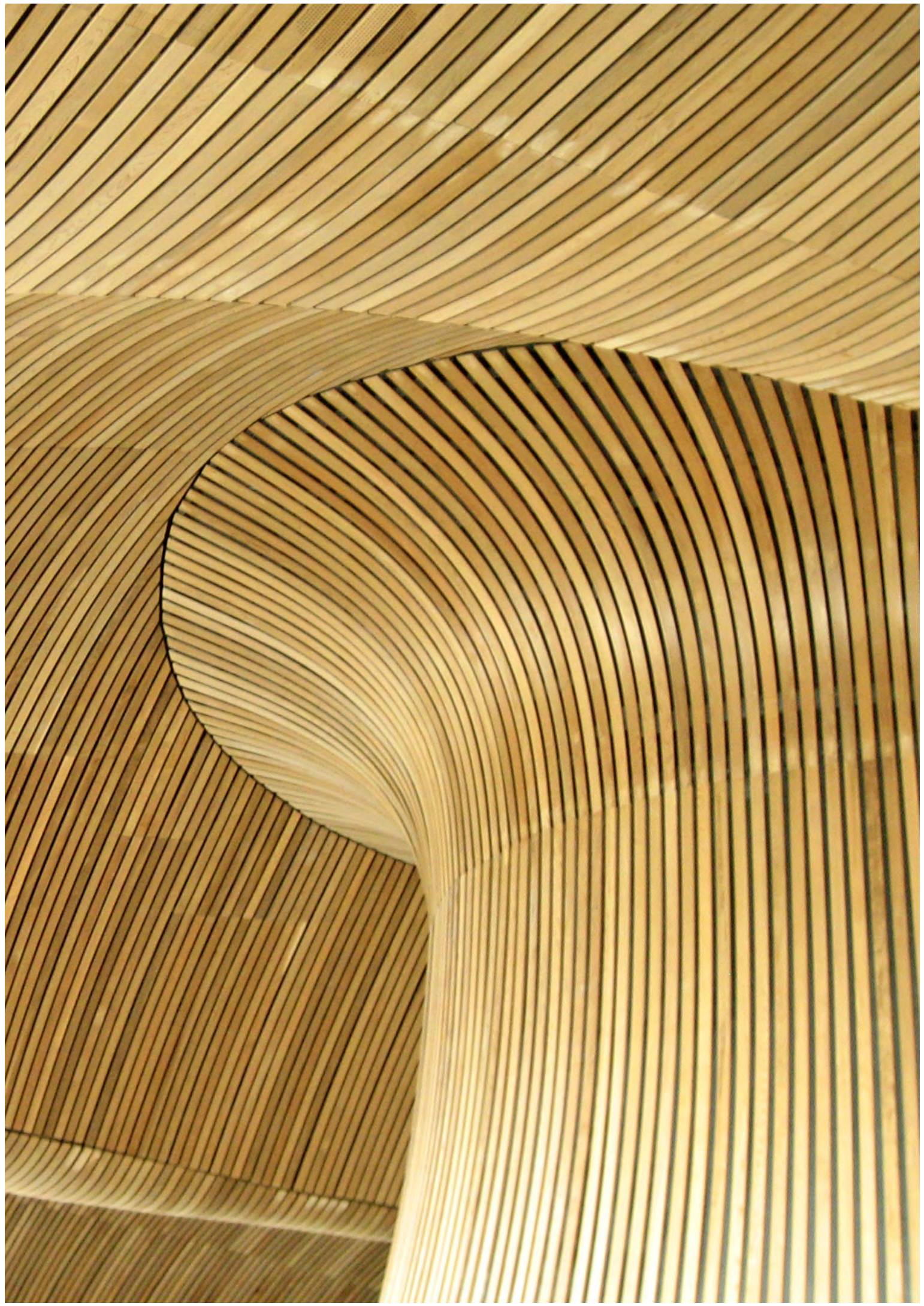
Audio and video recordings of the interviews are available here: <https://www.youtube.com/c/electoralreformsociety>

Andrew RT Davies AM  
Bethan Sayed AM  
Caroline Jones AM  
Cllr Debbie Wilcox  
Gerald Jones MP  
Cllr Rodney Berman  
Sian Gwenllian AM  
Cllr Yvonne Jardine

## **Social media call out**

We issued a call out on social media for people who had been put off from standing and asked them what their reasons for not standing had been. 11 people responded.







Despite how it sometimes comes across, each layer of governance is very different from the other. There are traditions long held at Westminster that would look ridiculous in the Senedd, likewise local government operates to completely different parameters in some respects.

This has consequences for the people that stand and are elected in each institution and when it comes to diversity we should not just be looking at barriers on the whole, but offer a thorough analysis of the barriers each of these institutions puts up.

We have therefore taken a look at the state of play in local government, Westminster and the Senedd and have developed specific recommendations to overcome the issues in each.

## Local Government

Last year saw local government elections in Wales and this drew focus on the paucity of diversity in local authorities. Our councils are the closest form of governance to us delivering vital public services on the ground that affect our day to day lives

immensely, and yet they are not reflecting the reality of modern life in Wales.

Council	Number of female councillors	Female councillors (percentage)
Blaenau Gwent	5	11.9%
Bridgend	17	31.5%
Caerphilly	19	26.0%
Cardiff	25	33.3%
Carmarthenshire	23	31.1%
Ceredigion	5	11.9%
Conwy	15	25.4%
Denbighshire	11	23.4%
Flintshire	18	25.7%
Gwynedd	17	23%
Merthyr Tydfil	3	9.4%
Monmouthshire	15	34.9%
Neath Port Talbot	21	32.8%
Newport	16	32%
Pembrokeshire	8	13.3%
Powys	23	31.5%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	31	41.3%
Swansea	30	41.7%
Torfaen	17	38.6%
Vale of Glamorgan	17	36.2%
Wrexham	10	19.2%
Ynys Môn	3	10%
TOTALS	349	100%

The bare statistics above paint a picture where gender balance is desperately poor. Just 30% of all candidates in last year's county council elections were women with 33% of wards having no female candidates at all, according to ERS analysis<sup>2</sup>. Given the low levels of diversity in candidates it is no wonder that of 1254 councillors in Wales just 349 are female, a damning 28%.

When it comes to leadership in local authorities the picture isn't that much better. It is fair however to recognise where progress has been made. The number of women leading local authorities doubled following last year's elections with four female leaders now in place across Wales. The Welsh Local Government Association also has its

2. BBC, 2017, Election 'diversity crisis' warning over women standing  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-39721534>

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first female leader in Newport Council Head, Debbie Wilcox.

Overall though, when it comes to council leadership the term ‘pale, male and stale’ appears to be here to stay. Of 22 local authorities in Wales two have absolutely no women at all in their cabinets.

On the issue of council cabinet diversity many people we interviewed pointed out the need for more women to be appointed to leadership positions. Debbie Wilcox explained her view on this issue, saying:

“I just think it’s unfortunate that, that situation has arisen...I have got a cabinet in Newport, we are not quite 50%, something like 45%, so there’s 9 of us, 4 women and 5 men and the diverse range of experiences and opinion that comes into a balanced cabinet is unquestionable.”

Yet, former Welsh Conservative Leader, Andrew RT Davies, whose party leads one of the two authorities that fail to have any women in cabinet disagreed:

“Rather than look at just the cabinet you look at the wider Conservative group on the Vale council and there [are] some fantastic female candidates... So young, old, middle aged, female, male, I would like to think that rather than focus just on the cabinet it’s important to look at the whole, and the whole certainly after the last local government elections dramatically changed the dynamics of the Conservatives here in the Vale of Glamorgan and beyond”

We often talk solely about gender when it comes to talking about diversity in politics but diversity represents a huge number of things alongside this; ethnicity, age, sexuality, religion, whether we have a disability or our financial circumstances.

The difficulty comes in terms of measuring these things. While our process of measuring gender isn't perfect and does make assumptions it is more accurate than trying to guess someone's age or whether they have a disability from their name or photo.

As such we have no complete information on other measures of diversity for any of the institutions we're examining. However, we do have some data that can present a basic picture of where we stand. In the process of this report we asked all elected representatives in Wales to complete a survey answering questions about themselves.

266 elected politicians completed this survey with 224 of these respondents being councillors.

224 Councillors responded to our survey

## Councillors

Gender		Number	Percentage	
Men		152	67.9%	
Women		70	31.3%	
Prefer not to say		2	0.9%	
Sexuality		Number	Percentage	
Heterosexual/Straight		198	88.4%	
Prefer not to say		13	5.8%	
Homosexual/Gay		8	3.6%	
Bisexual		5	2.2%	
Age	Number	Percentage	Female	Male
18-24	7	3.1%	2	5
25-34	21	9.4%	6	15
35-44	25	11.2%	9	16
45-54	34	15.2%	14	20
55-64	71	31.7%	23	48
65-74	53	23.7%	16	37
75+	13	5.8%	1	12

Ethnicity	Number
White – British, English, Northern Irish, Scottish or Welsh	203
White – Irish	1
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1
Black, African, Caribbean or black British – Caribbean	1
Prefer not to say	2
No answer	11
Other	5

This data suggests a predominantly male, straight, middle aged and white picture for councillors in Wales.

Local government in Wales is clearly not reflecting society properly in terms of its elected members. Piecemeal approaches to fixing diversity at council level clearly haven't worked- the proportion of women councillors in Welsh local government has grown only 6% in the last 13 years- and institutional solutions should be considered<sup>3</sup>.

As Debbie Wilcox said:

“I think we will always have to have some sort of quota system. All those kind of things are important and it's about breaking through those barriers because we wouldn't have had the representation we had in the Assembly if we hadn't had twinning.”

Ultimately without quotas applied to ensure diversity, progress will continue to be glacial. Efforts too should be made by parties to keep better data around the diversity of their candidates. Ideally this should be under section 106 of the Equality Act, which is the UK Government's duty to enact, but in the absence of this parties need to hold themselves to account in a much stronger way.

3. Stirbu, Larner and McAllister, 2017, Pitiful progress: Women councillors in Wales after the 2017 local elections <https://medium.com/athena-talks/pitiful-progress-women-councillors-in-wales-after-the-2017-local-elections-edbf39258c7>

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Leadership in local authorities also needs to be addressed. We should not be tolerating the lack of diversity in council leadership in Wales. Role models are vital in local government for creating a culture where there can be change. Too often diversity and equality can be a chicken and egg situation, where because people don't see people that represent them in positions of power they don't stand. Council leaders should be held to account by Welsh Government if they fail to select councillors who are diverse. The situation we currently have where two out of 22 authorities have no women on their leadership teams is untenable.

In response to this former leader of Cardiff Council, Councillor Rodney Berman, said:

“I think that’s quite shocking to be quite honest and I would like to think that I would never be involved in a cabinet that would be all male because that is just not reflective enough of the community. You can’t have more than 50% of the population not represented.”

Quotas alone are not a panacea. If we are to really dig into the barriers to reaching equality that are specific to local government then we must consider working hours and remuneration, as well as how to tackle the sexism and abuse we report in this study.

While a lot of people assume that councillors earn a lot of money for doing a few hours of work the reality is very different. A councillor in Wales who is not on a cabinet or a chair of a committee will earn around £13,300 per annum.

Indeed Gerald Jones MP for Merthyr and Rhymney, who served as a councillor between 1995 and 2015 raised this issue:



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“...the myth that being on the council is sort of part time, or an hour in the evening or the weekend is absolutely crazy.”

Given this it is incredibly common to see councillors who are working long hours balancing their political work with another job. On top of this, while council hours are decided by the individual council they are generally difficult for those working or for those looking after families. Being a councillor requires a huge amount of flexibility and compromise from your daily life. Realistically, it is difficult for many to do and no wonder that older and often retired men have traditionally dominated in this area.

As one of the respondents to our social media campaign told us:

“Being elected to council is something I have considered and it is something I may explore when I retire from work. That’s a bit daft really as we should be looking for the very best in our elected representatives not someone like me who is getting past his sell by date.”

Councillor Rodney Berman who has a full-time job as well as being the councillor for Penylan raised these issues in an interview with us:

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“[Working hours are] something that does need exploring because I did think about seeing if I could go maybe part time, cut my hours down in my current job (and) I am not sure that would have been an option...But you’ve got to think about how’s that going to play out in terms of, I have still got the mortgage to pay, I have still got bills to pay, I need to have an income. Therefore I have to think about do I want to make certain sacrifices in my career in order to further my political career?”

In light of these practical and financial implications we need to have a conversation about how to modernise local democracy to a point where it is an attractive role for a more diverse set of candidates. This could include a higher level of remuneration available for fewer councillors who could then work on a full time basis. We would suggest that the Welsh Government undertake a review of this.

While some will inevitably push back against our recommendations claiming that the current system rewards people on merit and experience, we would offer two counterpoints to this.

Firstly, it seems difficult to believe that in two local authorities in Wales not one single councillor who was not white, male or middle aged was qualified to be selected for cabinet.

Secondly, merit should absolutely be the central factor in deciding who should be selected to stand for election and who should then be elevated to cabinet level, but merit can be looked at in a number of different ways as a report by the Expert Group on Diversity made clear in 2014, where it gave an example of a different approach that could be used<sup>4</sup>:

4. Expert Group on Diversity in Local Government, 2014, Diversifying Democracy in Local Government in Wales <https://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/localgov/140305-expert-group-report-en.pdf>

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“In Swansea, the practice employed by the leader following the 2012 elections was to allow any member of the controlling political group to apply for cabinet posts and participate in an interview with the leader and deputy. Adopting this approach, rather than traditional patronage, led to a council leadership including four women and two younger men”

Having un-diverse local government reinforces the old boy’s club stereotype and puts local authorities at a clear distance from the people it represents. Diversity can be a critical part of bringing local authorities in Wales into the modern age.

### **Recommendation 1**

Welsh Government should introduce a 45% quota for women for each party at local government elections, meaning that at least 45% of their candidates should be female.

### **Recommendation 2**

Measures should be put in place to encourage a broader range of candidates from ethnic minorities, age spread and those with disabilities alongside ways to monitor the development of this. As part of this each party should ask candidates to fill out an equalities monitoring form upon selection and every party should make the headline figures of their candidates public in a standardised format to allow the progress of parties to be compared fairly. Each local authority should then publish a complete report of their makeup after each election.

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Council leaders should be held to account by Welsh Government if they fail to select councillors who are diverse for their leadership teams.

### **Recommendation 4**

Welsh Government should commission a review into councillor remuneration, which should include an analysis of the potential for fewer councillors at a higher salary.

# Westminster

UK Parliament is centuries old as a political institution and that can be apparent in some of the ways it operates. From the hooks for your sword to be hung, to the way MPs vote, Westminster is an institution that relies heavily on tradition. That's certainly apparent in the tradition of white, older men dominating those green benches.

Parliament performs dismally when it comes to equality. Consider this: just 489 female MPs have been elected in total since the Representation of the People Act 100 years ago<sup>5</sup>. Parliament currently has a record high with 32% of its MPs being women, but this number is still comparatively low. When it comes to Wales in Westminster, performance is below that figure, with 11 out of 40 Welsh MPs being women, only 27.5%.

5. House of Commons Library, 2018, Women Members of Parliament <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06652>

Number of female Members of Parliament representing Welsh constituencies

Year	Women	Men	Women %
2017-	11	29	27.5%
2015-17	9	31	22.5%

Part of the reason for Wales' poor performance on gender equality when it comes to Westminster is the failure of some parties to field female candidates in winnable seats.

Current Welsh Members of Parliament by party

Party	Women	Men	Women %
Labour	10	18	35.7%
Conservatives	0	8	0%
Plaid Cymru	1	3	25%

The Conservative party has never had a Welsh female MP, a fact that is genuinely shocking in the modern age. When we spoke to Andrew RT Davies, former Leader of the Welsh Conservatives, about this he said:

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“I think, wrongly a lot of people look and say that’s not for me. Sadly I don’t know why, maybe there’s a historical perception in that? If you look at the images coming out of the House of Commons, you see a wall of men debating and discussing and subconsciously people from an ethnic or diverse background, disabilities or women could think ‘that’s not for me’. And at successive elections we have sought, certainly over the last ten years, to broaden our base of candidates, have more women standing, more ethnic minorities standing. Is there more we can do? Of course there is more we can do.”

While this is certainly the case, it doesn’t paint the whole picture of why the party has failed to select women who have gone on to win. Ultimately parties that have used positive action, such as all women shortlists, have managed to increase the number of women elected to Parliament. The Conservatives did select women in target seats in Wales in last year’s General Election, specifically Bridgend and Newport West, despite significant kick back from local constituency parties, but ultimately both failed to be elected.

Andrew RT Davies AM discussed these issues within the party stating:

“Associations in the Conservative party are very autonomous organisations and like many individuals they hate being told what to do, for very good reasons. We are a membership organisation and rather than get told from the top what to do, membership organisations exist by being told what to do from the bottom via the votes within the associations. It’s a funny thing called democracy.”

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While the Conservatives have not pursued formal quotas they are emphasising the need for more female MPs through their Women2Win programme, a campaign to elect more Conservative women to parliament. Established in 2005 this has led to more women being elected and is continuing its work, with Wales being an area they are targeting. This type of campaign is in contrast to other parties' commitment to quotas.

In contrast to the Welsh Conservative position on positive action Welsh Labour has recently introduced a policy for UK General Elections where in every vacant seat a female candidate will be fielded via all women shortlists. They intend to keep this policy in place until the Welsh Labour parliamentary makeup equals 50% men and 50% women.

Ultimately, it is up to each party to make a decision about what measures work best for them, however we can see that more radical measures have traditionally proved more effective.

In addition to party selection, there is also the historic legacy of a complete dominance by men at Westminster, which is holding progress back.

Research by ERS has found the persistence of 'seat blocking', a consequence of the safe-seat culture nurtured under the Westminster voting system. Essentially given the very few marginal seats, in most cases men who have been elected in the past have held on to their seats until they decide themselves to stand down. This means that, despite the fact that new MPs being elected in 2017 were relatively gender balanced (40%), the legacy of a failure to tackle equality until recently has held back the average result. In fact 80% of current Welsh MPs elected prior to 2010 are male<sup>6</sup>.

Of the 212 currently-serving MPs first elected in 2005 or before, just 42 (20%) are women. Of 44 current MPs first elected in 1992 or before, only

6. ERS, 2018, Centenary: Legacy of inequality in Westminster elections halting Welsh progress <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/centenary-legacy-of-inequality-in-westminster-elections-halting-welsh-progress>



eight of them are women. And of course, the longer an MP holds his/her seat, the less likely a challenge seems.

## Seat blockers

Welsh MPs by their first year of election

Years (MPs for Welsh seats since:)	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
2001 or before	9	1	10	90.0%	10.0%
2005 or before	13	4	17	76.5%	23.5%
2010 or before	21	5	26	80.8%	19.2%
2015 or before	26	9	35	74.3%	25.7%

Parliament will fail to progress on equality unless it takes some serious steps. Firstly, beginning to measure the lack of diversity is vital. The UK Government has legislated under the Equality Act for parties to publish information around the diversity of their candidates for elections, however this provision has never been enacted. Often the reason for this is cited as due to the burden on smaller parties, however we know that some smaller parties already collect this information.

The lack of data on protected characteristics is a major barrier to progress on diversity. If we are unclear of the scale of the problem, then how can we begin to address it? Unless the UK Government takes this issue seriously and enacts Section 106 of the Equality Act, then the fundamentals of inequality will remain.

## Members of Parliament

11 Members of Parliament responded to our survey

Gender		
Men	8	72.7%
Women	3	27.3%
Prefer not to say	0	0%
Sexuality		
Heterosexual/Straight	10	91%
Homosexual/Gay	1	9%
Bisexual	0	0%
Prefer not to say	0	0%

Age	Number	Percentage	Female	Male
18-24	0	-	-	-
25-34	2	18.2%	0	2
35-44	0	-	-	-
45-54	3	27.3%	1	2
55-64	3	27.3%	1	2
65-74	1	9.1%	0	1
75+	1	9.1%	0	1
Prefer not to say	1	9.1%		

Ethnicity	Number
White - British, English, Northern Irish, Scottish or Welsh	11
White – Irish	-
Asian or Asian British – Indian	-
Black, African, Caribbean or black British – Caribbean	-
Prefer not to say	-

Alongside better data on diversity, we need to take positive measures to promote equality in Parliament. The current state of affairs – where women make up just over a quarter of Welsh MPs, where very few MPs are from a BAME background, where disability is still seen as a fundamental barrier to election – needs to end. Indeed, not one of the 11 MPs (out of 40 total Welsh MPs) identified as anything other than white.

Unless quotas are introduced on a legislative basis, things will not change. Without formal quotas, the current situation of parties feeling like they have to pass the mantle of a safe seat to the already established next in line will persist.

As a starting point, we would urge legislation to be put in place to ensure all parties field candidates made up of at least 45% women. Alongside this, work should be done to promote opportunities to BAME potential candidates, a wider range of age groups, people affected by disabilities, and the LGBTQ community.

While quotas are certainly a part of creating a more diverse Westminster, at a fundamental level

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there is another barrier to equality.

The electoral system is inherently creating a situation where modern attempts to compensate on equality are being held back by the legacy of previous inequality. Given the fact that so many of Westminster's seats are safe under First Past the Post the makeup of MPs who have seats from previous elections is staggeringly unequal.

A change to a proportional electoral system offers many benefits. Firstly, rather than one MP being elected for an area multiple MPs are elected offering a much wider range of representatives. In addition, a series of academic studies since the 1980s have shown that more women have been elected to parliaments through proportional systems. Indeed, 9 of the 10 parliaments with the best gender equality in the world use PR systems<sup>7</sup>.

As ERS Cymru wrote in our evidence to the National Assembly for Wales' Expert Panel on Electoral Reform in March 2017:

*"What is most important about PR systems is they give parties more options in terms of how they achieve gender parity. A party still needs to put up candidates who are women. But in a single member seat the guarantee is through mechanisms such as All Women Shortlists or Twinning – both rather blunt instruments. Quotas are less blunt in multi-member systems, which provide spaces for parties to promote a balanced ticket"*<sup>8</sup>.

In short, what this means is that under PR systems where you have multiple representatives for one seat there are more options to field diverse candidates.

Wales' representation in Westminster is being held back when it comes to diversity, and this is mostly due to three factors: the electoral system, a failure to deliver measures to ensure equality, and a failure to take this issue seriously.

The UK Government should recognise the huge amount of damage being done to Parliament by

7. Library of Parliament (Canada), 2016, Electoral Systems and Women's Representation  
[http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2016/bdp-lop/bp/YM32-2-2016-30-eng.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/bdp-lop/bp/YM32-2-2016-30-eng.pdf)

8. ERS, 2017, Submission to the Expert Panel  
[http://www.assembly.wales/NAfW%20Documents/About%20the%20Assembly%20section%20documents/Expert%20Panel%20on%20Assembly%20Electoral%20Reform/EP10\(a\)-Electoral%20Reform%20Society.docx](http://www.assembly.wales/NAfW%20Documents/About%20the%20Assembly%20section%20documents/Expert%20Panel%20on%20Assembly%20Electoral%20Reform/EP10(a)-Electoral%20Reform%20Society.docx)

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9. ERS, 2017, Missing Voices  
<https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/campaigns/upgrading-our-democracy/non-voters-missing-voices>

having a largely male and white group of MPs who do not reflect the population of the UK or its nations. Numerous people we spoke to in the course of this project and our work over the last year have talked about the distance between the public and political institutions<sup>9</sup>. That distance is perpetuating a ‘them and us’ culture, where people feel very removed from the politicians that represent them. That, as we will come to in chapter 2, is having serious ramifications.

Parliament should look to modernise and create a system where people of all genders, ethnic origin, ableness, age and sexual orientation can feel they have a place.

### **Recommendation 5**

The UK Government should enact Section 106 of the Equality Act in time for the next General Election, and all parties should publish equality data in a coherent and standardised format. At a Welsh level parties shouldn’t wait for the next UK General Election and should collate this information for the next Assembly and local elections.

### **Recommendation 6**

The UK Government should legislate ensuring all parties have to field candidates made up of at least 45% women. Work should also be undertaken to review how to put in place measures to promote other diverse groups.

### **Recommendation 7**

Each political party should introduce an action plan on diversity to select candidates for vacant target seats at a Westminster level.

### **Recommendation 8**

A proportional electoral system should be adopted for UK General Elections, to ameliorate problem of ‘seat blockers’ under Westminster’s system.

# The National Assembly for Wales

The National Assembly for Wales has in its nearly 20 years been quite well regarded when it comes to equality, at least in terms of gender equality. It hit headlines in 2003 when it broke records in reaching an equal number of men and women. Since then, however, it has slid back to the current 43%. While this is not bad in terms of global comparisons, it is certainly not that record breaking number it once was. What's more, this move backwards highlights the influence of election results on equality.

Number of women in each term of the Welsh Assembly

Assembly Term	Women total	Women %
2018-	26	43.3
2016-2017	25	41.7
2011-16	25	41.7
2007-11	28	46.7
2005-07	31	51.7
2003-05	30	50
1999-2003	24	40

Number of women in each party in the Welsh Assembly

Party	Male	Female	Total	Proportion
Labour	14	15	29	53.6
Conservatives*	9	3	12	25
Plaid	6	4	10	40
UKIP	3	2	5	40
Lib Dems	0	1	1	100
Independents**	2	1	3	33.3

\* We have included Mark Reckless in the Conservatives count as he sits within the group in the Assembly

\*\* We have included Mandy Jones, Neil McEvoy and Dafydd Elis Thomas as Independents

The second chart above shows the variance of gender in each party. While Labour, which employs both All Women Shortlists and Twinning, returned more female AMs than male at the last elections other parties have varied.

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Plaid Cymru have also used measures, including zipping, where women are automatically given first and third place on the regional list. However one of their members, Bethan Sayed AM commented on this in an interview for this report saying:

“Of course our party has taken steps to improve gender equality over the years by having positive action on the regional list system which is how I was first elected. But that has been diminished over the years”

The Conservatives, however, have not used any methods to ensure diversity and, as a result, have the lowest proportion of women AMs.

Last year’s Expert Panel report on Assembly Electoral Reform considered gender equality for the National Assembly for Wales in great detail and made some excellent recommendations, which we fully support. These include:

- The Assembly should request that the Secretary of State commences section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 in relation to Assembly elections, or transfers the power to do so to the Welsh Ministers. Otherwise, legislation to reform the Assembly’s electoral arrangements should include provision that would secure the availability of information regarding diversity.
- In order to safeguard the achievements of the Assembly and political parties in Wales in relation to gender-balanced representation, we recommend that a gender quota is integrated within the electoral system put in place for 2021. If this does not happen – whether through lack of political consensus or the limits of the Assembly’s legislative competence – we propose that political parties be expected to take steps



10. Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, 2017, A Parliament That Works for Wales <http://www.assembly.wales/NAfW%20Documents/About%20the%20Assembly%20section%20documents/Expert%20Panel%20on%20Assembly%20Electoral%20Reform/A%20Parliament%20that%20Works%20for%20Wales.pdf> page 12.

to ensure their candidate selection processes support and encourage the election of a gender-balanced parliament for Wales. This should include voluntary adoption by parties of the quotas we have outlined.

- Electoral law, Assembly procedures and the Remuneration Board's Determination on Members' Pay and Allowances should be changed to enable candidates to stand for election on the basis of transparent job sharing arrangements. The guiding principles of such arrangements should be that candidates clearly articulate the basis of their job sharing agreement to voters, that job sharing partners are treated as if they are one person, and that job sharing Members should give rise to no additional costs beyond those of a single Assembly Member.<sup>10</sup>

The recommendations have also garnered a lot of support within the Assembly, with Sian Gwenllian AM stating in an interview with us that:

“Up to now, it's been up to the individual political parties whether or not they adopt those particular mechanisms. It's worked to some extent to be fair but I think it needs to happen through legislation. The precise mechanism, that's to be discussed again, depending on what system we have going forward. If we have STV for example, a quota system would work well but if we don't get to that position we need a Plan B. We need to think how are we going to get more equal representation and should be looking at those specific areas like quotas and job sharing.”

With a plan in place to reach gender parity in the Assembly – dependent on party support of course

– there is scope to examine other areas of diversity where the Senedd has not performed as well.

26 Assembly Members responded to our survey, 43% of all AMs:

26 Members of the National Assembly for Wales responded to our survey

## Assembly Members

Gender				
Men	16	61.5%		
Women	10	38.5%		
Prefer not to say	0	0		
Sexuality				
Heterosexual/Straight	25	96.2%		
Prefer not to say	0	0		
Homosexual/Gay	0	0		
Bisexual	1	3.9%		
Age	Number	Percentage	Female	Male
18-24	0	-	0	0
25-34	1	3.9%	0	1
35-44	5	19.2%	3	2
45-54	7	26.9%	2	5
55-64	9	34.6%	4	5
65-74	4	15.4%	1	3
75+	0	-	-	-
Ethnicity				Number
White - British, English, Northern Irish, Scottish or Welsh				23
White – Irish				0
Asian or Asian British – Indian				0
Black, African, Caribbean or black British – Caribbean				0
Prefer not to say				1
Other (British Irish)				1
No answer				1

These results highlight the lack of diversity in the Assembly when it comes to other protected characteristics and reinforce what we already know. Indeed, the Assembly has never had a female ethnic minority AM, a genuinely shocking fact. Added to this is the fact that this is the first Assembly where we have had openly LGBTQ

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members. Progress is taking place on this issue, but it is slow and it is still difficult.

As AM Bethan Sayed said:

“On a wider level I think we have still got a long way to go. I did the BBC programme ‘The Hour’ from Swansea recently and I was sitting behind young women from an ethnic minority background and they were saying it is great to have so many women in the National Assembly for Wales but the diversity of those women is not something that they could identify with.”

While the Assembly is way ahead of local government and Westminster in terms of diversity, as an institution it still has a long way to go to be fully representative of the Welsh population.

Efforts to increase the number of candidates from a BAME background and to encourage those with disabilities to stand must be made by all parties.

While quotas are unprecedented on issues other than gender, they may need to be considered in these areas too at some point.

Ultimately a more diverse Senedd will be one that better represents the people of Wales and this should be the priority when considering our recommendations.

### **Recommendation 9**

The National Assembly for Wales should implement all of the Expert Panel on Assembly Reform’s recommendations on gender parity by the next Assembly election.

### **Recommendation 10**

Each party should look to field candidates from a more diverse background in the next Assembly elections, particularly female BAME candidates and those with disabilities.





WE ARE  
BETTER  
THAN THIS!

Whereas many of the barriers facing equality in public life in Wales are institutional, what parliaments and parties can do is also limited by societal barriers that put people off politics altogether. These come down to the reality of people's lives, the day to day things that make people think that politics is not for them.

Surprisingly it was these barriers that came to the forefront in the process of putting together this report.

## **Abuse and harassment**

By far the biggest issue we heard about from elected politicians and those who told us that they had been put off standing was abuse and harassment. Some of the stories we heard were genuinely shocking and indicate a major issue at the centre of modern politics.

121 politicians in our survey – 72 men, 47 women and 2 preferring not to say – stated they had experienced some form of abuse, discrimination or harassment in their roles.

Gender	Number indicating abuse	Percentage of total respondents (%)
Male politicians	72	40
Female politicians	47	54
Prefer not to say	2	100
Total	121	45.5

Politicians told us of incidents of being attacked in political literature, having received abusive letters and phone calls as well as being verbally attacked due to their position. Experiences were cited including:

“Face to face abuse whilst canvassing.’ and ‘Abuse from the general public when visiting local pubs and restaurants and door knocking”

“A constituent... met me whilst I was walking my dog and verbally abused me”

Some elected representatives indicated multiple types of abuse and thus appear in the above table multiple times

Type of abuse	Number of politicians
Online abuse	40
Abuse from constituents	22
Abuse from other politicians	19
Within party discrimination	2
Gender discrimination	15
Discrimination on basis of sexuality	8
On the basis of disability	1
Non specified	27
Other	22
Age	6

No level of abuse is ever justified, but some of the experiences of our surveyed elected members were disturbing and criminal:



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“I was sent excrement through the post in a (very tacky) Valentine’s card”

“[I received] inappropriate sexual advances by constituents during advice surgeries and during door to door canvassing sessions”

But these examples of awful experiences aren’t always perpetrated by an anonymous electorate. One respondent told us:

“I have been slapped on the bottom by one Member and another attempted to pull me under a tree and kiss me”

On top of the surveys, abuse and harassment was the main theme of the responses we had from people who said they had been put off standing. One respondent said:

“When I worked for politicians I had access to their social media, answered the phone on their behalf and opened their correspondence... I opened an envelope with razor blades stuck to the inside. A rock (and then traffic cone) was thrown at our shopfront office window, shattering the glass all over my colleague. I was stalked home by a constituent... On social media there were the usual rude comments about my bosses’ weight. My other boss who had a family had threats directed at his wife and children as well as himself. I know that if I ever stood then I would just have to accept this level of abuse - and being a woman I can only imagine the step up! That being said I am not comfortable with putting those I love - my partner and family - in the line of the abuse. Frankly they don’t deserve it”

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Our interviews with politicians also identified this as a barrier. Debbie Wilcox, leader of Newport Council, said:

“I have been a councillor for 14 years, I’ve won four elections and I’ve never had so much hassle or dissent as I have had in the last two years. I know quite a lot of politicians from my own party and I don’t know Diane Abbott but I can tell you the effects [it had]. It was appalling the treatment she had last year in the general election, the targeting of her as a BME woman. It was utterly disgraceful and it’s those type of things that put people off.”

Bethan Sayed AM agreed:

“Since I have got married to somebody from India, I’ve experienced perhaps more racial attacks in their tone that I have obviously never experienced before. So you have to deal with that as well and because, you know, do you report those types of things? Do you just accept it, saying that I don’t want to become a victim, or then are you part of the problem because you are not reporting them? I think it’s a very difficult position to be in as an elected representative. I don’t want to be, sort of saying ‘oh woe is me... look at the abuse I am getting’. I don’t feel that goes down well with the public either but then again we are humans and if someone attacks [you] and it is verging on abuse, you feel you have to do something about that”

Ultimately discussion around the abuse and harassment of politicians comes down to two

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issues. What is causing it, and what can we do about it.

The largest response to our survey of those stating they had been abused (40 respondents) identified that they had been abused online. Many of the people we spoke to believed this was in part due to the rise of social media, which has not only made politicians more accessible but has also created a world where the keyboard warrior thrives, a world where you can say whatever you like and hide behind an anonymous image of an egg.

Social media is still a relatively new part of our lives and, as such, we as users are still learning how best to navigate it. From this research and from other stories we have heard in the media over the last 12 months, it is clear that major changes need to be put in place.

Bethan Sayed AM said:

“With regards to the social media networks, they will only do things that suits them... we really need to find mechanisms that work to report them to those social media outlets as opposed to going straight to the police. There has to be a middle way... there are a lot of people who don't want to go to the police straight away to record that complaint.”

Sian Gwenllian AM said:

“The abuse that women in particular are having to face is just completely unacceptable and I think that is a cultural change that needs to happen. It's a bit of a sign maybe of how women are still viewed as people who can be demeaned and can be abused”

Social media companies must make the reporting and taking down of abusive and hateful content

11. Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2017, Intimidation in Public Life [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/666927/6.3637\\_CO\\_v6\\_061217\\_Web3.1\\_2\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666927/6.3637_CO_v6_061217_Web3.1_2_.pdf)

easier, quicker and more proactive.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) released a report in 2017, which looked at this issue in depth<sup>11</sup>. The report recommended that social media companies should develop a much more automated approach to tackling this kind of content, and also stated that social media companies should offer tools for users to escalate reports of illegal online activity to the police.

As has also been suggested by the CSPL, offering better training and guidance to candidates and elected representatives for dealing with/reporting abuse is another way of dealing with the impact of online abuse. Parties could also develop a joint code of conduct on intimidatory behaviour to be used during election campaigns.

In last year's *Missing Voices* report, we found a distinct feeling of 'them and us' among a lot of people we spoke to, with many suggesting that politicians do not represent real people. The project, which spoke to over 800 people across Wales, found that of 807 responses to our public survey 241 were negative about politics, with people citing the following as reasons why:

*"I think it [politics] is smoke and mirrors. A select few have all the power and pretend we have a say"*

*"Frustration, fighting, regression, some positivity, a lot of double standards"*

*"Power grabbing, scoring points, self-interest, league tables, statistics, arrogance, depressing"*

*"Spin. Bluster. Theatre. Disappointment. Lies. Division. Impossible task"*<sup>12</sup>

12. ERS, 2017, Missing Voices <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/publications/missing-voices/#sub-section-5>

This public dismay at the state of politics is undoubtedly an indication of why so many people wrongly take their frustration out on their local representatives. This gap between people and politicians demonstrates a complete breakdown in public discourse and a need for a stronger relationship between the two parties.

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The counter-argument to this is that some in public life and actors in the media do set a bad precedent on negative and polarising language. Take for example a newspaper front page in June which warned MPs of ‘ignoring the will of the people at their peril’ or another labelling some MPs as ‘saboteurs’. This creates a culture where the harassment and abuse is tolerated and used for monetary sales. Given this, it is no wonder that many people feel it is acceptable to treat politicians in this way.

Ultimately, politicians are people who – on the whole – genuinely want to do a good job for their constituents and their local area, yet seem to be bearing the brunt for a political system that many people feel isn’t delivering.

The responses we have gathered through the survey show that abuse is disproportionately affecting female politicians. This is clearly off putting to women and other diverse groups who may be interested in standing.

### **Recommendation 11**

The recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life that social media companies should develop automated techniques for identifying intimidatory behaviour and taking it down should be implemented. Social media companies should also offer tools for users to escalate reports of illegal online activity to the police.

### **Recommendation 12**

The Welsh political parties should develop a joint code of conduct on intimidatory behaviour. Better training and guidance to candidates on social media abuse should also be offered, as was also recommended by the CSPL last year.

### **Recommendation 13**

Better political education should be delivered in Welsh schools to begin to try and tackle the negative culture that is currently leading to a lot of the abuse we are seeing.

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## Family life

The realities of being a politician are often difficult for many people, not least those with families. This is an issue that does not solely apply to women, although it does disproportionately affect women and therefore acts as a barrier to diversity.

Improving access to politics for those with family commitments would be beneficial for a majority of politicians.

The impact of politics on family life was a key theme of the interviews we undertook with elected politicians. Nearly all of the politicians we spoke to, who come from a variety of backgrounds, emphasised the full time nature of the role of a politician. Far from being a 9 to 5 Monday to Friday job, depending on what institution you are elected to, being a politician often involves working at least six days a week from early mornings to late nights.

While this is a part of the job that many who are elected are aware of prior to standing, it still creates a lot of strain for those with families or personal commitments. Indeed, as the former Welsh Conservative Leader Andrew RT Davies AM highlighted when we spoke to him this doesn't begin when people are elected, but far before:

“There is that impact on the day job and by that I mean the one that pays the mortgage and ultimately puts the shirts on the kids' backs. Before you actually get elected you are a candidate for some considerable time and in today's politics especially at an Assembly level and Westminster level the public at large expect you to almost be a full time candidate.



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That’s a big conversation to have within the family about being able to take that two, three, four years out of your life and to be the candidate. So I do think there is a huge information exercise needed, a support exercise needed to try and get more people coming forward who don’t necessary see themselves as potential politicians”

While most discussions on workload are focussed on the Assembly and Parliament we shouldn’t forget the experiences of councillors, who often balance a full time job with their role as we highlighted in Chapter 1.  
Sian Gwenllian AM said:

“It is relentless. I found being a councillor was similar as well because people do expect you to be at the end of the phone or these days on Facebook messenger or whatever and they expect answers”

In terms of the Assembly and Parliament however, there is certainly a perception among members of the public that their work begins and ends with time debating or just observing in the chamber. The reality is one committee’s work includes hundreds of pages of reading a week alongside multiple meetings. In the Assembly it is not unheard of for a Member to be on three committees. They then have to balance this alongside time in party group meetings, at events, in the chamber, travelling to the constituency, holding surgeries, and running an office. This was highlighted by the Expert Panel on Assembly Reform’s report, which dedicated a chapter to the role and workload of Assembly Members<sup>13</sup>.

13. Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, 2017, A Parliament that Works for Wales <http://www.assembly.wales/NAfW%20Documents/About%20the%20Assembly%20section%20documents/Expert%20Panel%20on%20Assembly%20Electoral%20Reform/A%20Parliament%20that%20Works%20for%20Wales.pdf> Chapter 6

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Sian Gwenllian AM also raised this as an issue when we spoke to her:

“Being in the chamber here, that is one aspect of it, you have to do your work for that, prepare for that. There are committees, I sit on two committees and the workload on those, if you want to do your job properly, you have to spend time researching and sometimes that’s just not possible. Sometimes you have to accept that I am not going to be able to do this as thoroughly as I would like to. I think that deters scrutiny that’s happening here.”

Gerald Jones MP also touched upon the issue:

“Sometimes people do have a perception that the only role for MPs is in the chamber. There is a huge amount more to it than that. Whether it’s select committees, all party groups and duties within Parliament but also the balance with the constituency work as well because you have to balance the two.”

Given the extensive amount of work to do as a politician family and personal lives do take a hit and questions need to be raised about how political institutions can adapt to create a more family friendly working environment.

This was an issue we raised extensively with Debbie Wilcox, Leader of Newport Council. She explained how she has tried to make her council more flexible and adaptable:

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“When I started on the council and I was working full time as a teacher it was really impossible to try and get to some of these meetings that were held at 10 o’clock in the day [AM]. I’ve helped to change that over the years. For example, main council now begins at 5 o’clock [PM]... my own cabinet meeting, it used to be that you would have a pre-cabinet at 9 o’clock on a Monday morning and the public meeting at eleven. Well, I have switched that so now on a Monday we have pre-cabinet at half past four so I can have cabinet members who work. And then we have public cabinet then on Wednesday at 4 o’clock. So its about moving meetings. Again there is ups and downs with that. Some women tell me that’s when the kids get home from school, that’s when we have got to get tea sorted and get them onto their clubs and whatever so there is no perfect solution but moving meetings around, and we will develop more Skype and technology in the future. It’s still rudimentary at the moment but that would be a way forward so you can actually attend a meeting without actually physically being in a place”

Flexibility is something that more and more councils in Wales are adopting. We have spoken to other councillors and leaders in the course of this project who have emphasised efforts to introduce Skype meetings, to adjust meeting times, to allow babies and children to come along to a meeting with their parents if necessary. These changes particularly follow the statutory guidance issued by Welsh Government in their Local Government Measure 2011. We need to have local authorities

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that are adaptable to the needs of their members, and this is vital in moving towards a more diverse representation at local government level.

Questions also need to be asked about to what extent the Assembly and Parliament are creating an environment that is supportive for those with other commitments. While the Assembly is comparatively much more family friendly than Parliament, the workload put on Assembly Members is still considerable and the hours extensive.

Part of the pressure, particularly around committee responsibilities, would be reduced if the size of the assembly increases. While we believe it is vital that this happens, it will not be a panacea for those struggling to balance family commitments. Members have raised the absence of a crèche as an issue that creates difficulties for them. This is something that should be explored for both members and staff.

Job sharing is an additional element that would introduce a lot more flexibility into a politician's life, where two people split a role. This is something that the Expert Panel suggested for the National Assembly for Wales and is currently being undertaken by councillors in Swansea. While the electorate need to be aware of this arrangement and proper plans and agreements must be put in place, this could offer a much more manageable situation for many people who are put off from standing for election due to family commitments.

The other element that makes being a politician difficult when there are family commitments to balance is the distance that some members of both the Assembly and Parliament have to travel on a weekly basis. While Westminster is typically further away, for some North Walian AMs it is actually easier to get to London than to Cardiff Bay. Depending on where your constituency might

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be it is not unlikely that members would have to be away from home for nearly the entire week, leaving on a Sunday night and returning on a Thursday evening.

As Gerald Jones MP told us in his interview:

“I think it can [put people off] and certainly because of the hours. Let’s be honest about it, apart from the Members of Parliament who live in and around London who haven’t got the huge travelling distances, the vast majority of people in Parliament travel a long way so they are there for those days – Monday to Wednesday or Monday to Thursday most weeks.”

For AMs and MPs with families, while this might be routine, it is difficult. Ultimately this is a challenge that has few answers without fundamentally changing the way that our Assembly and Parliament work, but we should recognise its impact in putting off a lot of people who might be inclined to stand from diverse and different backgrounds.

#### **Recommendation 14**

An assessment of the viability of a crèche at the National Assembly for Wales for use by Assembly Members and staff should be undertaken.

#### **Recommendation 15**

Job sharing should become an option for politicians in every institution provided the proper arrangements are made.

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## Financial Barriers

Money isn't something that a lot of people might necessarily think of as a barrier to diversity in politics but this is something that has emerged throughout our research into this project.

While we have raised the specific challenges being faced by councillors in chapter 1, i.e. for those who aren't on a full time wage so often have to balance other full time work with council responsibilities, there are also challenges faced by other representatives.

This extends to some people taking a pay cut when elected to the Assembly or Parliament, however that is largely a thing that people plan for and are prepared for. The biggest strain comes prior to election when people put themselves through the process of selection and then candidacy.

Andrew RT Davies AM said:

“One of the big issues for candidates coming forward, male, female, a variety of ethnic backgrounds and disabilities as well is the level of commitment and time and energy that has to go into being that candidate and deflecting you from the job that is paying your mortgage and putting the shirts of the back of the kids and making sure you have an income coming through the door. I have genuinely seen many candidates who have virtually gone to the point of financial ruin by the energy and time that they've had to put in to being a candidate, not getting successfully elected looking back on maybe 8 to 12 years of being a candidate,



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because very often at a parliamentary level, either Assembly or Westminster a candidate can be fighting a seat for two or three cycles. To me the biggest obstacle for people coming in and putting themselves forward in the first instance is that fear almost of the unknown.”

And Gerald Jones MP said:

“[On] the cost side of things, there is a huge amount of fundraising goes on, certainly within political parties. Local elections are perhaps less costly but certainly Assembly and national elections do tend to be quite costly and that does take a lot of fundraising throughout the electoral term within constituencies. It does take a lot of planning and a lot of time as well.”

Depending on which party you stand for there is support available for candidates, however the extent of this varies. Welsh Labour have introduced funding for candidates and this includes earlier interventions, including sending people on residential courses to boost understanding of the role, which specifically targets people from a disadvantaged background. Other parties do not have this kind of machinery and it is very dependent on what the party thinks is appropriate and can afford.

In the report *Unpacking Diversity: Barriers and Incentives to standing for election to the National Assembly for Wales*, which was commissioned by the Assembly’s Remuneration Board, a recommendation is made around an Access to Politics fund being introduced. This is described

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14. Wales Governance  
Centre, 2018, Unpacking  
Diversity <http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/wgc/files/2018/07/REPORT-Unpacking-Diversity-July-2018.pdf>

as being similar to the Work Fund, which covers reasonable adjustment costs for employing disabled people<sup>14</sup>. However, they call for this to be extended to candidates from lower income households and other under-represented groups.

Making support for candidates less party-dependent could create a more level playing field and allow parties to progress on diversity, particularly if funding would be specifically targeted at potential candidates from a under-represented demographics.

## **Recommendation 16**

A review should be undertaken into how funding can be made available for candidates from under-represented or disadvantaged backgrounds, which should consider the ‘Unpacking Diversity’ report’s recommendation of an Access to Politics fund.



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# Conclusion

“Please can we not go over what the barriers are! I think we know what they are. I think now we need to say, right, there are barriers, there is a problem. What do we do about it? What we have done so far hasn’t worked...we haven’t really, fundamentally changed the situation and we need now to focus on solutions and getting rid of the barriers.”

Sian Gwenllian AM

Having diverse political institutions is fundamental to ensuring that politics works for all the people of Wales. We are currently in a situation where our decision making bodies fail to reflect the population – and this adversely affects how people feel about politics, as well as policy making.

The barriers for reaching higher levels of diversity are complex. As a result of this we have categorised them into two themes; barriers that are specific to the institution and those that are systemic and apply regardless of the institution.

This report has told the story of the people we’ve spoken to in the course of this project: 266 elected politicians via a survey, in-depth interviews with eight politicians and extensive contributions from eleven members of the public who told us

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they had been put off from standing.

These accounts paint a picture of a political system that doesn't work for many people who would be interested in standing; of one that requires major compromises in family life, of one that brings with it serious risks of abuse and harassment, and which for many has a negative financial impact.

On top of this our political bodies are putting up additional barriers in their failure to take responsibility for this lack of progress. We need these barriers – and this report has laid out some solutions.

We are at a point where serious action is the only way forward, and this includes the formal take up of quotas. Although not a panacea, they are an integral part of ensuring progress, and creating a much healthier and more representative democracy.

We have made a series of recommendations in this report that are targeted at many political levels from the UK Government, to the National Assembly for Wales, local authorities and even social media companies.

In the last 100 years small steps have been taken to improve the diversity of our political institutions. What's now needed are much larger strides.

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