

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 17 January 2022

Barriers to Elected Office

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	All
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To note the limited diversity/demographic data that is available on candidates and elected members.
- 1.2 To commission a voluntary survey of elected members to provide data on the status of current councillors with respect to protected characteristics.
- 1.3 To note the work undertaken nationally by COSLA to address barriers to elected office in local authorities in Scotland.
- 1.4 To establish a series of independently facilitated cross party workshops to:
 - 1.4.1 consider actions that could be undertaken at a Council level and within political parties at candidate selection, to increase the diversity of the councillors as a representative democratic body; and
 - 1.4.2 propose changes to working practices for councillors to support full involvement and limit barriers to participation.

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Barriers to Elected Office

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 A motion approved by the City of Edinburgh Council on 17 March 2022 required a breakdown of the numbers of candidates and elected members by gender and underrepresented groups to inform discussions around further action to be taken at a Council level to increase the diversity of the councillor group. This report presents the limited data that is available, notes work underway nationally and proposes the establishment of facilitated cross party workshops for elected members to consider further actions in areas within the control of the Council that could be taken in preparation for the next Council election in 2027 to promote diversity of representation and to promote full involvement of current councillors.

3. Background

- 3.1 At its meeting on 17 March 2022 the City of Edinburgh Council approved a motion by Councillor Main requesting a short report, giving a breakdown of the numbers of candidates and elected councillors by gender and by underrepresented groups to inform discussions and further action to be taken. It further requested that this report included details of “work that could be undertaken at a Council level to meet our collective commitment to increase the diversity of the councillor group and to ensure that CEC is a representative democratic body serving all of Edinburgh’s communities.”
- 3.2 Elections to City of Edinburgh Council were held on 5 May 2022 to elect 63 members. 143 candidates stood for election across the 17 wards.

4. Main report

- 4.1 Demographic and diversity data on both candidates and elected members is limited. There is no legal requirement for such data to be provided and therefore any survey to gain this data will be voluntary in nature.
- 4.2 There is no collection of diversity data as part of the legal nomination process for councillors in Scottish Local Government Elections. The Scottish Government worked with the Electoral Management Board for Scotland (EMB), the Electoral Commission (EC), COSLA, the Improvement Service and a range of equality stakeholders to develop a survey collecting diversity data of candidates standing at the May 2022 Local Government elections across the 32 councils. All 2,548 candidates standing for election in the May 2022 Local Government elections in

Scotland were invited to take part in the voluntary survey on candidate diversity characteristics.

4.3 The results of the national survey were published by the Scottish Government on 14 November 2022. 720 responses were received to the survey, which represents an overall response rate of 28.2%.

4.4 The survey was designed to collect data on all protected characteristics, excluding marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity, reflecting the approach set out in Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010. This therefore included age, sex; gender reassignment; disability; race; religion or belief, and sexual orientation. In addition, questions on socio-economic status in line with the Fairer Scotland Duty, questions on previous experience as a candidate / elected representative and on caring responsibilities were included.

4.5 The survey produced a set of evidence which can be considered in relation to issues of representativeness of candidates as compared to the Scottish population. Its general conclusions were:

“... there are areas where there is evidence to point towards the potential for over and under-representativeness of certain segments of the population amongst the candidate respondent group. For instance, with regards to sex, age, education, disability status and socio-economic background there appeared to be notable divergence between the profile of respondents as compared to the overall population.

Specifically, we saw evidence for fewer females, younger individuals, individuals with less than degree level qualifications, individuals with a limiting health condition and individuals from lower-socio economic groups as compared to the population as a whole. Despite this there were also some results that ran contrary to this trend with there being a higher proportion of respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or in some other way other than heterosexual as compared to the overall population.

Further analysis which incorporated consideration of intersectionality uncovered a more complex picture with regards to representativeness. Notably that gender imbalance, in the form of over-representativeness of males amongst respondents was particularly high in the younger (18 to 34) and older age groups (65 plus) and lower amongst those in the middle age group (35 to 64).”

4.6 52 of the 143 candidates in Edinburgh responded, a response rate of 36.4%. To preserve the anonymity of the candidates, a breakdown of the results by local authority is not available and no statistics for Edinburgh are available from this survey addressing these characteristics. It would be inappropriate to make judgements about the status of the 143 candidates with respect to the protected characteristics based on the data that is held on them from the Notice of Poll.

4.7 With respect to actions to increase diversity on Council, any proposals will need to be based on accurate data and relevant research. For the 63 elected members of the Council, there has at this point been no work to assess data on protected characteristics similar to that found in the Scottish Government survey. There is no requirement for councillors to declare their status with respect to these

characteristics. Again, it would be inappropriate to make judgements about the status of the councillors without such a voluntary survey.

- 4.8 An exit interview of a sample of councillors was undertaken at the end of the 2017-2022 council. This identified several challenges faced by councillors that may present barriers to seeking elected office, particularly around integrating council activity with other work and caring responsibilities.
- 4.9 In terms of potential barriers to elected office there has been substantial work undertaken on a national basis by COSLA. This has included:
- Barriers to Elected Office Special Interest Group (2019-22) – A cross-party group of councillors chaired by then COSLA President Cllr Evison.
 - Councillor remuneration – a survey of councillors was carried out in summer 2021 to gather an evidence base on councillor workload as part of work to tackle financial barriers caused by the current rate of remuneration.
 - Following discussions with the Minister for Local Government on the councillor survey results, a joint COSLA-SG statement to announce a joint review of councillor remuneration was released in February 2022.
 - Guidance for local authorities (to adopt on a voluntary basis) was developed on the following topics family leave, menopause and lone working for councillors.
 - From August and November 2021, COSLA's *Why You?* social media campaign profiled 11 current councillors (including 8 women) to demonstrate that there is not one 'type' of person who can become a councillor and to encourage a wider range of people to consider standing in 2022. This had significant engagement across Scotland.
- 4.10 It is understood that COSLA is convening a new Special Interest Group for the 2022-2027 Local Government term to continue this work. Some other local authorities across Scotland and the UK have also been undertaking research to consider these issues.
- 4.11 The diversity of elected members is not solely driven by policies, meeting schedules and working practices of the council. Those councillors elected will initially be candidates generally selected by political parties, although there are independent candidates who stand, and the diversity of the final council will depend on the diversity of the ballot paper. The conditions prevalent in the council may discourage some candidates but the parties ultimately select the candidates to contest each ward.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Identifying the factors that may contribute to the current representativeness of candidates and councillors as compared to the Edinburgh population such that actions can be taken in response will require both data and research.
- 5.2 A voluntary survey to collect diversity data of the 63 elected members of City of Edinburgh Council will be included in the work programme for the Policy and Insight team in Corporate Services to be undertaken during the first quarter of 2023. However there will be some selection bias in such a survey as those elected by definition have not been prevented from standing for election. It is anticipated that the work will consider issues beyond the Equalities Act's protected characteristics,

for example including those who may be care experienced, act as unpaid carers those who have another income sources. There will also be an opportunity to gather anonymous feedback and reflections on general or culture discrimination issues.

- 5.3 A series of independently facilitated cross-party workshops is to be scheduled. The first workshop will define the objectives and the work programme of the future session. There will be two representatives from each political group to allow a diverse membership. A remit will be agreed to review the data on current councillors, consider work undertaken and planned by the COSLA Special Interest Group and other local authorities and propose actions to be taken by council if evidence shows that there is a concern about current representativeness of candidates and councillors, noting that many candidates are selected by parties. In order to assess representativeness there will also need to be an understanding of the current demographic breakdown of the city and relevant data will need to be identified and assessed.
- 5.4 The cross-party workshops will also identify challenges inherent in current working practices for councillors, standing orders etc that may limit full participation in responsibilities due reasons such as caring responsibilities, family leave or menopause. Independent facilitators from outwith the Council will be engaged, to ensure that all potential issues are identified with actions to address the various barriers.
- 5.5 Proposals will be reported to Committee allowing immediate action which could address barriers ahead of the 2027 council elections and change working practices immediately for current elected members.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The survey of councillors will be included in the work programme of the Policy and Insight Team. An online survey would have minimal cost, although there will be a requirement for officer time to create, test, deploy and analyse the survey.
- 6.2 The cross-party workshops will require administrative support and this will be identified from within the Member Services team. Independent facilitators for the workshops will be identified in consultation with CoSLA and the Improvement Service.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The aim of this work would be to increase the representativeness of the candidates standing for election in 2027 and then the members elected in those polls.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [Scottish Government Local Government Candidates Survey 2022](#)
- 8.2 COSLA work on barriers to elected office
 - [Renumeration survey findings](#)
 - [COSLA news release on renumeration survey](#)
 - [Joint COSLA-Scottish Government statement](#)

- Guidance on [Family Leave Guidance for Councils](#) (September 2019), [Menopause Guidance for Councillors](#) (June 2020), and [Lone Working Guidance for Councillors](#) (September 2020)

9. Appendices

9.1 None.