

DATA LABEL: OFFICIAL



CORPORATE POLICY & RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT & SCRUTINY PANEL

ELECTED MEMBERS EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY WORKING GROUP

REPORT BY HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide the Corporate Policy and Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel with an update on the progress that has been made taking forward the actions agreed by Council Executive relating to the West Lothian Elected Members Equality and Diversity Working Group recommendations.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Panel:

1. Notes progress in taking forward the actions agreed by Council Executive to address barriers which might present themselves to prospective, new and incumbent elected members with protected characteristics.
2. Notes the update on the SLARC review and how this relates to recommendations of the Working Group.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caring and Compassionate • Open, honest and accountable • Collaborative, inclusive and adaptive
II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	None
III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None
IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators	A number of performance indicators are currently used to measure the council's progress in the Equality and Diversity Framework 2021-2025.
V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	N/A

VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	None
VII Consideration at PDSP	N/A
VIII Other consultations	Governance Manager African Women's Network Carers of West Lothian Close the Gap Disability West Lothian Fair Justice System for Scotland

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D.1 Background

On 25 January 2022 West Lothian Council agreed, through a composite motion, to establish a short life working group of elected members and others to consider equality and diversity issues in relation to the common procedures and practices of elected members.

On 28th February 2023 a report was presented to West Lothian Council providing an update on the work of the Elected Members Equality and Diversity Working Group (EMEDWG) and an action plan of recommendations to address barriers which might present themselves to prospective, new and incumbent elected members with protected characteristics.

D.2 Progress update

The findings and recommendations of the EMEDWG were categorised under the following three key themes:

1. Accessibility
2. Engagement with Under Represented Groups
3. Visibility and Role of Elected Members

An update on progress with actions from theme's one and two are set out in Appendix 1.

As agreed by Council Executive, actions identified under theme three were referred on to COSLA, the Improvement Service and the Scottish Local Authority Remuneration Committee (SLARC) for consideration and details of these are contained in Appendix 2.

Another of the agreed actions was to undertake a Disability Audit of council committee meetings. Information on the issues raised as part of this Audit were capture during the EMEDWG consultation with key stakeholders; details of this are contained in Appendix 3.

In addition to the above, to help increase visibility on the role of elected members at a local level the council held an event on the 23rd February 2024 that brought together female elected members and young people from schools across West Lothian. Information was presented to the young people on the range of services delivered by the council and the role of elected members. Elected members discussed with the young people how they became an elected member, including key achievements and the barriers they have faced. Evaluation feedback was very positive and there was an agreement to hold a similar event at a future point.

D3. **Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC)**

One issue identified by the Group concerned councillor remuneration. The [Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee](#) (SLARC) was reconvened by the Scottish Government in April 2023 to undertake an independent review of councillor remuneration. As well as looking at remuneration levels and affordability, its remit also covered broader issues concerning remuneration and overcoming barriers to elected office. Its [final report and recommendations](#) were issued in February 2024.

All were accepted by COSLA. Some of the recommendations align to the Working Group's Action Plan:-

- that the role of councillor continues to be fulfilled on a part-time basis, while the role of Senior Councillors is likely to require to be fulfilled on a full-time basis (SLARC Recommendation 1)
- that all councils should review their internal and partnership governance arrangements, to assure themselves that councillors are able to fulfil their statutory duties (SLARC Recommendation 16)
- that the Scottish Government and COSLA make a joint public statement endorsing the important role played by councils and councillors to spearhead a wider multi-media public awareness campaign to raise public awareness and encourage potential candidates to stand for office (SLARC Recommendation 18)
- that COSLA develops a Pre-Election Induction Programme for potential council candidates to provide potential candidates with an accurate understanding of the role of the councillor and the demands they are likely to face (SLARC Recommendation 19)
- that a national dataset be established showing the demographic composition of the country's councillors, and how this is changing to help identify key population groups who continue to be under-represented within councils to enable action to be taken to remove barriers and enable wider participation (SLARC Recommendation 20)
- the Scottish Government, COSLA, and representatives from all under-represented groups should consider how best to support councillors in these groups, and to encourage and enable more people from under-represented groups to stand for office, particularly women, young people and people with a disability (SLARC Recommendation 21)

The Scottish Government responded in July 2024 setting out a position on each recommendation where Scottish Government actions was called for. It did not therefore comment on Recommendations 16, 19 or 20. It noted Recommendation 1 and welcomed the work done by councillors whether part-time or full-time. It agreed to issue a public statement in relation to Recommendation 18 in advance of the 2027 local government elections but said that the related awareness-raising campaign is for local government to do. In relation to Recommendation 21, it noted the desire to work on encouraging and supporting representation from under-represented groups and stated that activities would be determined by local government.

APPENDIX 1**West Lothian Council Action Plan Progress Information****Theme –Accessibility**

Action	Update on Activity to Deliver Action	Responsible	Date action completed
1.Continue to refresh and deliver equality and diversity awareness raising sessions to council staff and elected members on protected characteristics.	<p>The council has delivered equality and diversity awareness and Integrated Impact Assessment training, and bespoke training for services in regard to specific protected characteristics. Mental health training has been delivered to employees and managers.</p> <p>The refreshed Equality and Diversity e-learning module is now mandatory for all employees to complete on an annual basis.</p> <p>The council will continue to refresh and deliver equality and diversity awareness raising sessions to elected members through the regular programme of elected member training days.</p>	Head of Corporate Services	Ongoing
<p>2.Undertake a Disability Audit of council committee meetings covering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meeting attendance • council reports and papers • duration of meetings • accessibility for those with impairments 	The Audit has been completed. Details of findings and action taken are attached in Appendix 3.	Head of Corporate Services	March 2024
3.Consider where appropriate the promotion of the use of Plain English in committee reports and motions and amendments.	<p>The Audit has been completed. Details of findings and action taken are attached in Appendix 3.</p> <p>A section is contained in the draft report writing guidance which is to be implemented in April 2025 about style/grammar. It is, however, acknowledged that some</p>	Governance Manager	March 2024

Action	Update on Activity to Deliver Action	Responsible	Date action completed
	technical and complex vocabulary and information is required.		
4.Promote the use of easy read documents and summary information on key council papers	The Audit has been completed. Details of findings and action taken are attached in Appendix 3.	Head of Corporate Services	March 2024
5.Ensure the council's Jargon Buster, which explains terminology for all services, is subject to annual review and update.	The 2024 annual update is complete.	Head of Corporate Services	December 2024
6.Deliver training from Visibility Scotland on how to make committee reports and motions and amendments for visually impaired readers.	A programme of training requirements for elected members will continue to be developed.	Medium Term	Head of Corporate Services
7.Promote the ReCite me function on the council's website.	All pages on the council's website have the ReciteMe (assistive technology) function. The ReciteMe function is prominently displayed on the council's landing page and there is a prompt highlighting the function.	Head of Corporate Services	March 2023
8.Provide information to Elected Members on the Sensory Support Service - Health & Social Care Partnership (westlothianhscp.org.uk)	Information was provided following meeting on 28 February 2023.	Head of Corporate Services	March 2023
9.Raise awareness of transportation options such as the HcL (Dial-a-Ride & Dial-a-Bus) - West Lothian Council And Accessible transport Transport Scotland for those that may experience travel issues.	Information regarding transport options is provided on the council website. Bespoke advice is provided in regard to enquiries from those that experience travel difficulties due to mobility issues (including advice regarding community transport and assisted transport).	Head of Corporate Services	March 2023
10.Provide support and training to Community Councils to encourage hybrid meetings.	Community Councils have been provided with guidance suggesting systems they could use to hold virtual meetings, and encourage hybrid meetings.	Head of Corporate Services	March 2023

Action	Update on Activity to Deliver Action	Responsible	Date action completed
11.Undertake Access Audit for the Civic Centre	An audit was undertaken and actions have been implemented to improve accessibility.	Head of Finance and Property Services	April 2023
12.Review Access Audits of council Partnership Centres	In July 2023, Induction Loop Survey and Inspection Report were undertaken and produced for Jim Walker Partnership Centre and Strathbrock Partnership Centre. The implementation of key recommendations on maintenance and installations will continue for all other partnership centres in 2025.	Head of Finance and Property Services	July 2023
13.Review council HR policies related to protected characteristics to determine any transferability to elected members.	<p>Following endorsement by Council Leaders of Family Leave Guidance prepared by COSLA the council introduced the Elected Member Leave Scheme in 2020. This provided Elected Members with access to provisions in relation to Maternity Leave, Adoption Leave, Shared Parental Leave, and Surrogacy Leave.</p> <p>In 2023 the Elected Members Leave Scheme was extended to include provisions for Elected Members who are unable to undertake their official duties as a result of ill health. At this time access was also provided to Elected Members to Counselling Services through the council's Employee Assistance Programme and Physiotherapy Services. Elected Members also have access to lone worker devices for use as appropriate.</p>	Head of Corporate Services	March 2023
14.Consider activity required to obtain Carer Positive accreditation	Carer Positive Accreditation was achieved in May 2024	Head of Corporate Services	May 2024

Action	Update on Activity to Deliver Action	Responsible	Date action completed
15.Chief Executive issue a letter to the Scottish Government requesting that the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 be amended to introduce a reasonable adjustment which permits an Elected Member on family leave to nominate one other Elected Member to act as their proxy	On 28 February 2023, Council Executive instructed the Chief Executive to write to the Scottish Government to ask that they consider amending legislation. The Scottish Government is now consulting on the introduction of proxy voting . The consultation period started on 3 October 2024 and ended on 28 November 2024. The Council has submitted a consultation response.	Chief Executive	February 2023

Theme - Engagement with Under Represented Groups

Action	Comments	Responsible	Date action completed
1.Continue to support the Race and Faith Forums	<p>The Community Race Forum is supported by the Councils Community Planning Officer who provides a link to the Council, and other Community Planning Partners. Work is being undertaken to look at promoting the panel, recruiting new members and looking at how the forum can raise its visibility in communities in West Lothian.</p> <p>The West Lothian Faith Group is also supported by the community planning team.</p>	Head of Planning, Economic Development & Regeneration	Ongoing
2.Explore options to secure representation at PDSPs from organisations and forums such as the Race Forum, African Women's Forum and Disability West Lothian.	As part of the continual review of governance arrangements, amendments to the Scheme of Administration took effect on 1 January 2025 which provide that the Community Race Forum and the council established Faith Group will be added to the umbrella list of community and other bodies which are entitled to send representatives to PDSP	Community Wealth Building Manager	Action to be completed by December 2024
3.Encourage members of under-represented groups to observe in public gallery or watch meetings on YouTube to increase	Action to be take forward once the changes to the Scheme of Administration noted above become effective on 1 January 2025.	Community Wealth Building Manager	Action to be completed post the

understanding of how 3rd sector participates/engages with council processes.			previous action above
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APPENDIX 2

Theme - Visibility of Role and Work of Elected Members

Action	Directed To
Use national campaign days as opportunities to highlight how individuals with a protected characteristic could be a councillor.	COSLA
Organise an event to showcase the work of elected members and target attendance at those from underrepresented groups	COSLA / Improvement Service
Engagement with 3rd sector to encourage greater diversity of candidates to stand for election.	COSLA / Improvement Service
Offer an all party shadowing & mentoring programme to increase the understanding of the role of a elected member e.g 'A week in the life of a Councillor'	COSLA / Improvement Service
Promote the toolkit for equal representation in politics into councillor's induction Equal Representation in Politics	COSLA / Improvement Service
Provide feedback on the impact that the elected members remuneration may have on the payment of benefits.	Scottish Local Authority Remuneration Committee (SLARC)

APPENDIX 3

Information on issues contained in this Disability Audit below were captured during the stakeholder consultation undertaken by the members of the Elected Member Equality and Diversity Working Group.

Issue	Recommended Actions	Timeframe	Responsible person/officer	Progressing
1. Length of meetings without breaks can be a barrier to participation.	Provide guidance on the length of meetings and/or suggested break times in the Standing Orders. Standard introduction to hybrid meetings includes chairs commitment to breaks every two hours or so. Changes to Standing Orders will require a full council decision.	Medium Term	Governance Manager	Amendments to Standing Orders will take effect on 1 January 2025 which will provide that the Chair, when ensuring that the agenda of business is properly dealt with, and that reasonable steps are taken to enable effective participation by members, officers, and members of the public, will include adjournments and comfort breaks at appropriate times at approximately two hour intervals.
2. Papers often arrive a few days before meetings and feedback suggested that giving full attention to reading the papers can be problematic. Particularly if the papers contained detailed, technical	Review timing of committee papers being sent to elected members. Changes will require amendments to Standing Orders via full council.	Medium Term	Governance Manager	The timeline of issuing committee reports was reviewed. It was agreed that any extension could have wider negative consequences on governance and reporting arrangements – e.g. timings political group meetings, services area meetings and community commitments/engagement.

Issue	Recommended Actions	Timeframe	Responsible person/officer	Progressing
information, for example, papers delivered to the Development Management Committee.				
3. People with a visual impairment - there needs to be a suitable format for reports. For example a Braille text reader. People with dyslexia might struggle to read the papers in the given time.	Explore possibility of reports being provide in an alternative format that can read by text reading software. The council website has recite me function that will read documents. Promote the ReCite me function on the council's website. Documents should have 'End of report' at the end so the text reader will let the person know that they have reached the end. Report-writing guidance can be updated to reflect changes made.	Medium	Equality and Diversity Officer/IT Services Manager/Governance Manager	The contract for the council's reading software – ReciteMe, has been renewed and promoted. The committee report template and guidance are currently being reviewed and updated. Changes to take effect in April 2025.
4. Requirement for flexibility someone to stand in for your meeting	Review possibility of providing a substitute at committee meetings.	Medium Term	Governance Manager	Substitute members attendance is available at all but two committees (both planning). SLARC recommended legislation to allow proxy voting. See previous comments.