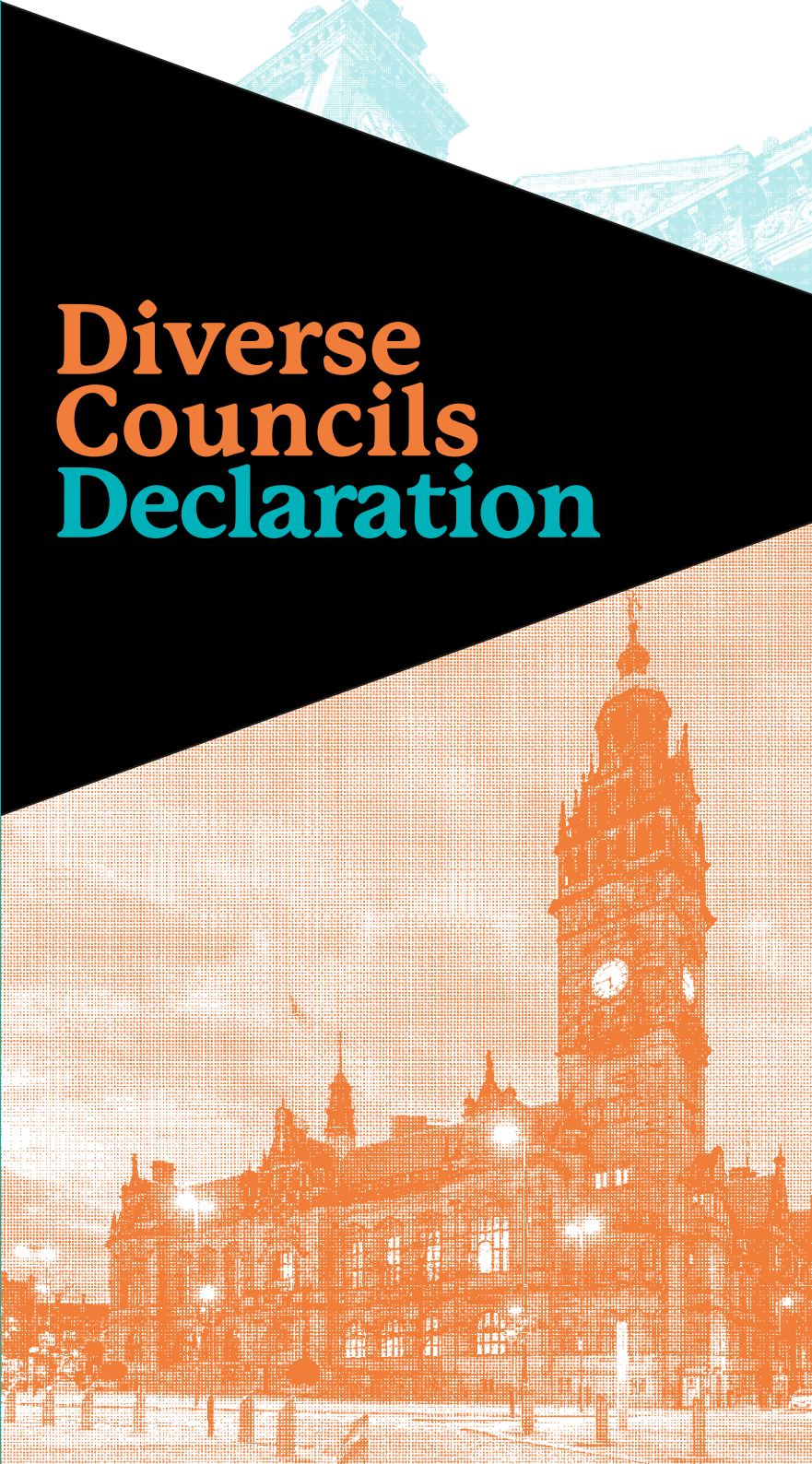


the co-operative party

Diverse Councils Declaration



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Diverse Councils Declaration

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

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

Foreword



**Baroness Debbie
Wilcox of Newport**



**Cllr Anntoinette
Bramble**
London Borough of
Hackney

Two of the key co-operative values are equality and democracy.

With this at heart, we have been working with colleagues in the Co-operative Party and local authorities throughout England on a project to bring the success of the Welsh Local Government Association to England. We have developed this Declaration for councils in England aimed at increasing diversity in local government.

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

Our consultation revealed that whilst 96.2% of respondents felt that it is important for good decision making that our council reflects the diversity of our residents, less than half felt that their own authority was achieving this well enough at present. Recent figures show that

96% of councillors describe themselves as white, 88% as heterosexual or straight, 16% have a disability or long term condition, 36% have caring responsibilities and only 36% are female.

There is a clear appetite and need for change.

We are proud to announce our new Diverse Councils Declaration. We hope you will take up this challenge to create a more diverse and inclusive democracy.

Introduction



Jennifer Hemingway
Equalities Officer for the
Co-operative Party

The co-operative movement has always been about members of the community joining together to make a difference.

Whenever anyone looks at our councils' debating chambers they see that our elected local government representatives are generally older, more white and more male than the communities they represent. At the Co-operative Party we want to change that – by removing the barriers that hold our councils back from becoming more diverse, more equal institutions.

Labour & Co-operative councillors have a part to play, by adopting the Diverse Councils Declaration.

Our co-operative values are the driving force of our mission to increase the diversity of local councils across England. Councillors represent their community. We want to ensure that everyone sees themselves reflected amongst those who make decisions which affect their lives. Bringing multiple experiences and perspectives together leads to better decision making for the people our councils serve.

We urge Labour & Co-operative councillors to be at the forefront of change. Ensuring our councils are diverse is the best way to inspire leaders of the future and ensure our communities are more resilient and inclusive going forward.

“Our co-operative values are the driving force of our mission to increase the diversity of local councils across England. Councillors represent their community. We want to ensure that everyone sees themselves reflected amongst those who make decisions which affect their lives.”

What is Diversity?

Diversity in democracy is about ensuring that our representatives reflect the many different people, identities and cultures in the wider community. This is particularly important for protected characteristics - age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.



Why does it matter?

Different experiences, perspectives and voices lead to better decisions.

A truly diverse council is one that is far more likely to understand the needs of its residents and be able to fulfil them. The life experiences from many different people bring enhanced creativity and innovative ideas so councillors can be more effective in their roles.

A council that visibly reflects its community is more respected and trusted by the public as residents are more likely to see themselves reflected amongst their representatives.

We know that people are more likely to strive to be something if they can see it.

By ensuring a more diverse council we will enrich not only local democracy, but our community as a whole.

Requirements

Below are some guidelines about how the elements of the declaration can be implemented by councils.

1. Provide a clear public commitment to improving diversity in democracy.

This is the cornerstone to the Declaration. A statement to the community and clear lines of communication on progress with partners will be necessary to ensure that the council is truly representative of the community it serves.

2. Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all, promoting the highest standards of behaviour and conduct.

There are a number of ways to enact this aspect of the Declaration, but our recommendation would be to take the steps outlined in the Local Government Association's Equality Framework for Local Government. The four improvement modules are on *Understanding and working with your communities*, *Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment*, *Responsive services and customer care*, and a *Diverse and engaged workforce*. Taken together, this Framework is a useful tool in achieving substantial culture change.

3. Set out a local Diverse Council Action Plan ahead of the next local elections.

This part of the Declaration is key. Your Action Plan should set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time bound) goals and be reviewed regularly to ensure it is meeting not just the requirements of the Plan, but the wider spirit of your endeavour. Begin by reviewing the demographics of your elected members in comparison with those of your area¹. Key milestones should include: Diversity Ambassador appointment with specific targets, establishment of a mentoring and shadowing programme designed to reflect the needs of your specific community, scheduling and running information and learning events for potential candidates, co-operative working with partners in the planning, promotion and delivery of the actions in the plan, a survey for candidates and councillors that has clear objectives prior to being run and established actions based upon findings, and clear targets that the council might stretch to achieve at the next local election. This Action Plan to be reviewed and evaluated upon completion for learning and further steps. You can find examples of Action Plan points at this link: <https://party.coop/diversecouncils/action>

¹Appendix 2 – Resources: points 1 and 2

4. Work towards the standards for member support and development set out in the LGA Councillor Development Charter and/or Charter Plus.

Learning and development for councillors is important in ensuring that councils and councillors deliver what communities need. The LGA's Councillor Development Charter² supports councils to enrich their councillor development programmes. Through this concise framework, councils can take a strategic approach to towards councillor development and support with step-by-step targets to evidence the skills and knowledge garnered by councillors throughout the programme.

5. Demonstrate a commitment to a duty of care for Councillors by:

- **providing access to counselling services for all councillors**
- **having regard for the safety and wellbeing of councillors whenever they are performing their role as councillors.**
- **taking a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment of members including through social networks.**

Care and well-being of elected members is an increasing area of focus in many local authorities. Options for achieving this include, but are not limited to, Mental Health First Aid training³, working alongside local partners to provide counselling services without additional costs to members. Bullying and harassment has increased in recent years, in person but particularly online⁴. Women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ colleagues and those with disabilities are targeted at disproportionately higher rates. Councils should visibly adopt a stated zero-tolerance approach. Practical steps and guidance from the LGA are available.⁵

³Appendix 2 – Resources: point 4

⁴Appendix 2 – Resources: point 6

⁵Appendix 2 – Resources: points 7 and 8

6. **Provide flexibility in council business by:**
- **regularly reviewing and staggering meeting times**
 - **encouraging and supporting remote attendance at meetings**
 - **agreeing recess periods to support councillors with caring or work commitments.**

Many councillors take on the responsibility of being an elected member alongside other family and work commitments. The time commitment required to be an effective councillor can hold back those aspiring to serve their community in this way. The recognition of this and implementation of a flexible way of working widens opportunities. Women are disproportionately impacted by caring commitments, so flexibility in meeting times and opportunities for remote working allow more women to stand⁶. Additionally, those with a disability or long-term condition can benefit from hybrid or remote working if mobility issues arise. Councils can achieve this by reviewing the current meeting times and seeking to diversify timings. This goes beyond seeing what works for current councillors, but must also take into consideration how the existing meeting times may deter those who might put themselves forward as candidates in future. Hybrid or remote working, where possible in law, can accommodate busy schedules and mobility needs.

7. **Ensure that all members take up the allowances and salaries to which they are entitled, particularly any reimbursement for costs of care, so that all members receive fair remuneration for their work and that the role of member is not limited to those who can afford it.**

Fair remuneration is essential for anyone in work. The time and dedication required to be a councillor should be compensated proportionately. For those with caring responsibilities, councils should ensure that there is a dedicated policy for remuneration of care so this is not a financial obstacle to participation as a councillor.

⁶Appendix 2 – Resources: point 9

- 8. Ensure that the council adopts a parental leave policy setting out members' entitlement to maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave and relevant allowances.**

Councils should ensure that insofar as the law allows Members are able to take appropriate leave at the time of birth or adoption, that both parents are able to take leave, and that reasonable and adequate arrangements are in place to provide cover for portfolio-holders and others in receipt of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) during any period of leave taken. See resources later in the document for links to the LGA website for a model policy.⁷

- 9. Ensure that councillors from under-represented groups are represented whenever possible in high profile, high influence roles.**

The councillor development and support programme outlined above will ensure a wide pool of talent in any authority. Councillors from under-represented groups should be actively encouraged to take on high profile, high influence roles. Mentorship and shadowing opportunities should be made available to members to encourage individuals into more senior roles. Councillors, as a group, should recognise and promote the talent and diversity of colleagues so the council will actively and visibly recognise all people in society.

⁷Appendix 2 – Resources: point 5

Case study



Cllr John Cotton

Leader
Birmingham City Council

Diversity is what makes Birmingham great. We are a city of a million people with roots right around the globe: home to people from 187 nationalities and, as the latest census shows, one of the first “superdiverse” cities in the UK, with ethnic minority citizens making up over 50% of our population.

As political leaders, we’ve worked hard to ensure that our 65-strong Labour Group properly reflects this diversity. 44% of our colleagues are from Black, Asian or other minority ethnic communities. We are gender-balanced for the first time in our history and have a record number of LGBT+ Councillors.

We are proud that our cabinet has an 80% majority female executive as well as four out of ten coming from our minority ethnic communities. It’s a far cry from the 90% white, 90% male Cabinets of the past, and rightly so. We’ve also ensured that half of our Scrutiny Committee Chairs are also from minority ethnic backgrounds.

These things matter, because people rightly expect to see a leadership that “looks like them”. For too many people in Birmingham, social and economic opportunities remain

limited because of race, their class, their gender or other protected characteristics. Warm words on diversity won’t solve these injustices. They demand real and sustained action.

That’s why we’re taking steps to ensure that the City Council’s workforce – at all levels – also reflects the diversity of the city that we serve. In doing so, we’ve had to face up to some stark truths and harsh facts. In 2020, we published the City Council’s first ever Race Pay Audit, which laid bare the truth that 67% of our minority ethnic staff were working in frontline, operational roles and were deeply underrepresented at senior grades, creating a race pay gap alongside the disparity in pay between female and male staff.

We’ve overhauled our recruitment processes: insisting that shortlists for senior roles are genuinely diverse and always include female and minority ethnic candidates. We’ve put in place a Positive Action recruitment statement, setting out our expectations and reasons why we need to change the game on diversity in recruitment, and we’ve commissioned an independent review of our HR function, so

we can ensure that barriers to advancement are removed and glass ceilings are broken. The signs of progress so far are encouraging. Crucially, we are starting to see progress on broader representation at senior levels across the organisation. Over the three-months to the end of November 2022 we saw an increase of 9% in the appointment of Black, Asian and minority ethnic candidates to leadership roles, a 7% increase in shortlisted candidates and a 3% increase in longlisted candidates.

We're doing this in partnership with our staff, trade unions and communities: and we're holding ourselves to account by publishing our diversity data, so we can track in real time our progress in ensuring greater diversity and that these pay gaps are closing.

But there is still much more to do if we are going to eradicate the race and gender pay gaps and ensure that our Council's leadership – politicians and officers alike – reflects the diversity of our city. We're determined to deliver and build an organisation that is inclusive for all our citizens.



Top to bottom: Members of the Diverse Councils working group at the launch of the Declaration at Local Government Association in Westminster. Councillors from across the region joining Birmingham City Council representatives at Birmingham Pride 2023.

Appendix 1 – Model Motion

This council notes:

Councillors represent their community and it is important that they reflect the diversity within their communities, particularly those with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation).

The work of the Co-operative Party in developing a Declaration for councils aimed at increasing diversity in local government.

The council has already [include areas of the charter you are already doing]

This council believes:

Diversity in representation makes for good decision making.

This council resolves:

To adopt The Co-operative Party's Diverse Councils Declaration to increase diversity in our local government: [Declaration]



Southwark Council were the first to pass the Diverse Councils Declaration officially.

Appendix 2 – Resources

- 1. National census of local authority councillors 2022**
<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/national-census-local-authority-councillors-2022>
- 2. Office for National Statistics tool to obtain a Local Area Report for England and Wales**
<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/home/profiles.asp>
- 3. The Councillor Development Charter (and Charter Plus)**
<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/councillor-development-charter-and-charter-plus>
- 4. Mental Health First Aid England**
<https://mhfaengland.org/>
- 5. LGA Parental Leave Policy for Parents**
<https://www.local.gov.uk/lga-labour/our-work/parental-leave-policy-councillors/parental-leave-policy-councils>
- 6. LGA Report Debate Not Hate: The impact of abuse on local democracy**
<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/debate-not-hate-impact-abuse-local-democracy>
- 7. Councillors’ guide to handling harassment, abuse and intimidation from the LGA**
<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/civility-public-life-resources-councillors/handling-abuse-and>
- 8. Civility in Public Life from the LGA**
<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/civility-public-life-resources-councillors>
- 9. Guidance to support councillors who are carers**
<https://www.local.gov.uk/lga-labour/our-work/guidance-support-councillors-who-are-carers>

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