



WEN Café: Equalities Hustings

23rd April 2021

Summary of discussion

Chair: Patience Bentu, Race Council Cymru

Speakers:

Jane Hutt, Welsh Labour Senedd candidate for Vale of Glamorgan

Mia Rees, Welsh Conservatives Senedd candidate for Cynon Valley

Oliver Townsend, Welsh Liberal Democrat Senedd candidate for Islwyn

Elin Walker Jones, Plaid Cymru Senedd candidate for Clwyd West & North Wales regional list

Helen Westhead, Wales Green Party Senedd candidate for South Wales Central regional list

The Equalities Hustings were held by WEN Wales in partnership with Disability Wales, ERS Cymru, EYST, Race Alliance Wales, Race Council Cymru, and Stonewall Cymru. Candidates representing the five parties above were firstly presented with questions from the partner organisations, with one minute each to respond. This was followed by questions from attendees of the event posted in the chat during the event. The event was designed to give attendees an opportunity to hear about and ask question regarding the commitment of the major political parties in Wales to equality, intersectionality, and fighting discrimination against marginalised people.

This is a summary of what was said by candidates during the hustings event. WEN makes no comment, analysis, or critique on the commitments of the parties nor what was said by the candidates during the event. Any reference to 'we' in the summary is from the perspective of the candidate speaking at the time. The event is available to watch in full [here](#).

Q1 from Disability Wales asked the candidates what their parties would do to earn the trust of disabled people.

- Westhead acknowledged the shocking impact of Covid on disabled people and believes that the Green Party's Universal Basic Income policy would help tackle the poverty some disabled people face. Better accessibility in transport and housing needed.
- Townsend – disabled people have been impacted more by loss of life during Covid than any other group. There has been a shift backwards to the medical model. Disabled people must be represented in politics. Welsh Lib Dems support a proportional voting system.
- Rees – these inequalities are not new; they have been magnified during the pandemic. Disabled people earn less in employment. Welsh Conservatives would focus on three key areas – housing, education, and employment. Simplify and streamline the housing adaption system, increase funding in education, better promotion of the Access to Work scheme. Breaking down barriers to employment.
- Walker Jones has seen first-hand the dreadful effects of Covid on the families with disabled children she works with in her role as a psychologist, not being able to access support. Plaid Cymru wants to create a health and social care service so that social care is aligned with health, free at the point of access to everybody whatever their needs. Flexible working – lockdown has shown that it can be done.

- Hutt acknowledged the disproportionate impact of Covid on disabled people and recommitted the Welsh Government (WG) to taking forward the social model. The first thing that needs to be done – implementing the recommendations of the report commissioned by WG from the Disability Equality Forum. Welsh Labour has committed in the manifesto to incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People into Welsh law. Already appointed Disabled Employment Champions and committed £40 million to employment support for those most negatively impacted by Covid.

Q2 from Race Council Cymru asked the candidates what democracy would look like for them in the next government, in light of the Race Equality Action Plan, the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on ethnic minority people, and increased campaigns for ethnic diversity.

- Hutt – one of the first things Labour did at the beginning of the pandemic when the disproportionate impact was being seen was to set up an advisory group to develop a workforce assessment tool for BAME people. Developed the Race Equality Action Plan throughout the year, co-produced, which is now out for consultation. Important to deliver strategy to improve the representation of BAME people in all public appointments and in politics.
- Walker Jones – Plaid Cymru recognises that racism is systemic and institutional and is committed to tackling it. Representation in politics and public appointments is key to this. Need to be tackling racism in education and will implement the recommendations of Charlotte Williams’ report on BAME communities in the new curriculum. Plaid wants to see Welsh history in all its diversity in the new curriculum enshrined in law. Ensure positive action schemes for underrepresented people.
- Rees – the pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated existing inequalities. Democracy looks like the society it serves and there is a lot to be done by all parties. Welsh Conservatives have a fund that promotes diverse candidates, but the party has more to do. Would introduce a race equality plan with clear targets, focusing on four key themes: racism, education, health, and employment.
- Townsend – we must name it for what it is – we live in a racist system. No more platitudes, we must commit to action. Welsh Lib Dems are committed to implementing the Charlotte Williams recommendations. Seeking devolution of criminal justice to Wales – so many injustices have been copied over into the Welsh justice system.
- Westhead – the Green Party stands in solidarity with grassroots organisations like Black Lives Matter. Would take an international stand on justice, decolonise education, put Wales in charge of policing. Need greater diversity in political representation - Greens have a challenge fund to support that.

Q3 from ERS Cymru asked what the parties would do to introduce statutory measures to ensure greater diversity as recommended by the expert panel on assembly electoral reform.

- Westhead – Wales Green Party have taken measures to broaden the candidates standing – if 50% of candidates are not anything other than white male, elections are reopened. Have achieved that this year with gender diversity but not in terms of racial representation. Learning from the larger Scottish Greens on how to increase their member representation and help potential candidates overcome barriers to standing. This includes the challenge fund for greater diversity. Bring decision-making to the people it affects most.

- Hutt – Labour established the Access to Elected Office Fund to support disabled people to run. Committed in the manifesto to taking forward the recommendations from the Laura McAllister report (action delayed by the pandemic). More diversity is vital. She is in the position she is in because of positive action - a Welsh Labour twinning policy.
- Townsend – a first past the post system makes it almost impossible for smaller parties to get anywhere without constant campaigning. This privileges people from wealth, people who are cis, non-disabled, white, male – that is wrong. LDs want a proportional voting system. It allows more opportunities for people who do not have the resources. Welsh LDs the only party in the Senedd with a female leader.
- Walker Jones – Plaid Cymru are committed to proportional representation and implementing the recommendations of the expert panel on assembly electoral reform, in particular on single transferable voting, gender quotas, and expanding the Senedd. Plaid would create a cabinet level post of Minister for Equalities and Women’s Empowerment. Committed to 50:50 gender balance. Committed to citizens’ assemblies, and a rural assembly. UBI to support people in poverty to participate fully in democracy.
- Rees – there is a dominance of a certain type of person in politics. Hopeful that the Welsh Conservatives will see the first woman of colour elected to the Senedd at this election. But that is not enough. The party has a programme called Ask Her to Stand, looking to build on that with the Conservative diversity project. More to do in this area.

Q4 from EYST asked what the parties will do to tackle specific forms of racism such as antisemitism and racism against East and South East Asian people.

- Hutt – has spent the past year focusing on how we can develop an anti-racist Wales. The Race Equality Action Plan is a plan for an anti-racist Wales, in contrast to the Sewell report from the UK Government which sets things back. Welsh Labour Government commissioned Gaynor Legall to do an audit of monuments and street names connected to slavery, supported Charlotte Williams in her key work on the Welsh curriculum. 50 grants going to community organisations. The test will be the delivery – crucial that we move forward to anti-racist Wales, which includes climate justice, jobs, education, culture, sport, every aspect of life.
- Walker Jones – Plaid acknowledges that racism is systemic, this is unacceptable. Welcomes the race equality action plan, wants to tackle racism in education and at work. Would like unconscious bias training across the board.
- Rees – The Welsh Conservatives’ race equality plan has measurable outcomes and targets to be held accountable. Committed to working with religious communities to address religious hate crime, focusing on Islamophobia and antisemitism.
- Townsend – must admit we are a racist society, wants up to date hate crime reporting figures, to understand where the barriers are, challenge it, repair it – review of our society’s systems. Explain or reform principle.
- Westhead – hearing a lot of plans and ambitions from parties already in power. The heart of the Greens’ ethos is climate justice and social justice. In the other UK nations where Greens have a seat – Greens ask the right questions, challenge thinking, hold the Government to account. Greens would do the same in Wales.

Q5 from WEN Wales asked what parties plan to do to improve diversity at all levels of our political institutions.

- Westhead – used to being the only woman in the room, which is not acceptable. Green Party will not attend a hustings where there is an all-male panel, and if that is the case, they will send a woman instead.
- Townsend – gatekeepers of democracy are alarming – the party leaders debate did not need to be all-male, as the Welsh Lib Dem party leader is a woman. Standing in for a woman of colour who could not make the hustings, but he is speaking as a gay and disabled candidate.
- Rees – the key thing is taking the step from being a grassroots campaigner, to standing for office. Understands why women would not want to do that due to targeted abuse. A need for better support for those standing for election.
- Walker Jones – this is why I keep standing. Needs to be more women and diverse people in politics. Poor representation in the council in Gwynedd. Need more representation at the grassroots level.
- Hutt – recognise the barriers to going into politics. Mentoring is vitally important. Access to Elected Office fund for disabled people. Need more women in public appointments. Local politics is also a route.

Q6 from Stonewall Cymru asked how parties would ensure that all teachers are equipped and supported in the delivery of LGBT+ inclusive relationships and sexuality education, now mandatory in the new curriculum.

- Hutt – LGBT+ education is at the core of the new curriculum – proud of this. Training needed for teachers and parents, public education to tackle lack of understanding.
- Walker Jones – delighted that the new curriculum is highlighting PSE as a core subject and that teachers will be supported to deliver this. Plaid committed to making sure that this education will include LGBT+ community as a core element.
- Rees – section 28 has cast a long dark shadow over the history of the Conservative Party. Believes that it is the party's responsibility to undo the damage done and go above and beyond to ensure that our schools are an inclusive environment for all pupils. Teachers must be equipped to help pupils deal with homophobic or transphobic bullying, and also equipped to deliver fully inclusive relationships and sexuality education. Committed to mental health support for LGBT+ pupils and all pupils.
- Townsend – this is more than political due to personal experiences at school. Teachers stood by and did nothing. Support for teachers in engaging with young LGBT+ people is needed. Schools also need to be a safe space where pupils have therapeutic support.
- Westhead – The Greens LGBT community has been working with the Young Greens on a Young People's Manifesto – practicing what we preach in terms of shaping policy. Trans young people are having a difficult time. Expresses Greens' strong stance in favour of validation of the identities of trans and non-binary people.

Q7 from chatbox asked how the parties will tackle sexism, misogyny, and sexual assaults in schools.

- Hutt – our curriculum assessment bill will help to address this. Not just teachers, but governors. It will happen through legislation, training, and public education.

Q8 from chatbox asked what practical commitments parties will make to supporting disabled people's organisations and the SeeAround Britain app.

- Townsend – as a disabled person, trying to work out where you can visit without knowing whether it is accessible is exhausting. Welsh Lib Dems want to see the use of the £500 million towns fund to make places more accessible.

Q9 from the chatbox asked whether parties would provide childcare support for all children from 6 months for parents in education or training.

- Rees – Committed to expand childcare offer to all from 2 years old. This needs to be looked at further. This is a social mobility issue preventing women from accessing the workplace.
- Westhead – not just a childcare issue, it is structural inequality. UBI would give basic financial security to allow greater flexibility and for couples and families to design their lives around what meets the needs of their family.
- Walker Jones – agrees with Westhead’s comments on UBI. Need radical change in society – the root cause is poverty. Plaid would introduce a UBI pilot.
- Hutt – childcare is so important for all parents, crucially women as they are so often the main carers. Welsh Labour will fund childcare for more families where parents are in education or training. Crucially important in terms of tackling inequalities is that the Welsh Labour Government has kept Flying Start programmes going for children in some of the most deprived communities. Not just childcare, but extra support for parenting.

Q10 from the chatbox asked what each party will do to ensure disabled people are actively involved in politics and can access their polling stations. Reports of some disabled people being told to call their polling stations to ask whether they are accessible.

- Rees – all polling stations should be accessible. Need more representation of disabled people in politics, including in local government.
- Hutt – it is unacceptable and we need to know now if disabled people are being told to call their polling station to check whether it’s accessible. It is local government delivering those polling stations but we must know if this is happening.

Q11 from the chatbox asked how each party would challenge myths around people who seek asylum or sanctuary. Some parties’ election materials add to the hostile environment.

- Townsend – it is wrong and must be robustly challenged, anyone who doesn’t is part of the problem. Welsh Lib Dems would legislate to make sure that access to health services will not be compromised by services reporting people to the Home Office. People should be able to access health services without fear of deportation.
- Hutt – that has been the case in Wales [accessing health services without fear of deportation]. We abhor the hostile environment. Wales is a Nation of Sanctuary and all public services have a commitment to making that the case.