

Consultation on the extension of job share provisions for elected members of principal councils to non-executive roles

October 2024

About the Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales: Our vision is of a Wales free from gender discrimination where all have equal authority and opportunity to shape society and their own lives. We work with our vibrant coalition of organisational and individual members to transform society. Our work sits under three pillars. We will Connect, Campaign and Champion women so our vision is realised.

1. General observations/comments on the operation of job-share arrangements within executive roles within councils in Wales

As evidenced in the findings of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform,¹ the Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform² and a briefing commissioned by WEN Wales and the Electoral Reform Society (ERS) Cymru,³ job sharing is a valuable tool for increasing diversity of representation and making political roles more accessible to a wider range of candidates.⁴

Job sharing can enable individuals with caring responsibilities, disabled people and those with long-term health conditions to engage in public office, fostering representation that better reflects local communities. By acting as an informal mentoring arrangement between a more and a less experienced candidate, job-sharing can also help bring in fresh perspectives of people who would not otherwise have put themselves forward for a political role and nurture talent from underrepresented groups.

It has been noted that job-sharing can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of political institutions beyond fostering diverse representation. It can deliver a “two for the price of one” deal in terms of harnessing the complementary skills and experience of job-share partners.⁵ By enabling partners to maintain stronger connections to their local communities and their lives outside of the council, job-sharing can also enrich their representative and scrutiny roles.^{6,7}

Politicians with experience in job-sharing or diversity and equality have echoed these points. One stakeholder noted that job-sharing could allow young professionals to balance work and community roles, addressing class issues and creating an in-built mentoring system.⁸ This arrangement builds confidence in leadership positions, where job-shared partners can serve as sounding boards, helping one another navigate challenges and questions. Furthermore,

¹ Senedd Cymru (2017), *Expert Panel on Electoral Reform*, <https://senedd.wales/how-we-work/our-role/future-senedd-reform/expert-panel-on-electoral-reform/>

² Welsh Parliament Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform (2020), *Senedd reform: The next steps September*, <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld13452/cr-ld13452%20-e.pdf>

³ Women's Equality Network (2022), *Job-Sharing For Senedd Members*, <https://wenwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Jobshare.WenWales-Final.pdf>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Welsh Parliament Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform (2020), *Senedd reform: The next steps September*, <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld13452/cr-ld13452%20-e.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Women's Equality Network (2022), *Job-Sharing For Senedd Members*, <https://wenwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Jobshare.WenWales-Final.pdf>

⁸ Ibid.

job-sharing encourages teamwork and collaboration. Two people can share responsibilities, represent each other at events, and work together on projects, creating a sense of trust and mutual understanding. The regular consultation between partners helps clarify decisions and ensures a consistent approach to governance.⁹ These personal accounts underscore the potential of job-sharing to foster teamwork, develop ideas, and build trust.

Against this background, the introduction of job-sharing arrangements within executive roles and the planned extension to other senior roles in principal councils is highly commendable. It offers a pathway for people from underrepresented groups to progress into senior political roles and can help increase the diversity of perspectives in these roles. This is particularly important considering the recent reduction in the proportion of female local authority leaders. Between 2023 and 2024, this figure halved from 18% to 9%.¹⁰ By providing a stepping stone into executive roles, job-sharing for executive and other senior roles could play an important role in helping to mitigate the severe underrepresentation of women in local government leadership.

As part of our consultation response, we have reached out to individuals who are currently, or have recently been, in a job-sharing executive role in two principal councils in Wales. While the limited number of potential interviewees means results could not be representative, all the benefits outlined above were strongly echoed in their experience and the extension of job-sharing was generally welcome.

While job-sharing was largely seen as a positive development, our interviewees reported some practical challenges:

- **Lack of guidance and structure:** Job-sharing arrangements could be more effective with guidance and/or advice and how others have effectively managed practicalities.
- **Confusion over roles:** officials and colleagues may be uncertain about which job-share partner to approach, leading to delay in decision-making and communication gaps.
- **Workload:** The demands of the role can regularly extend beyond the expected demands of a job-share into full-time hours, which can make it difficult to combine with other commitments.
- **Impact on non-executive members in smaller authorities/councils with a small majority:** The increased number of executive members through job-sharing can place additional pressure on non-executive members, particularly for governing parties that only have a comparatively small number of backbenchers.

Although these are practical challenges that have emerged in the implementation of job sharing within executive roles, some of these could be addressed by creating opportunities for new job-share partners and support staff to learn from others. This could potentially be done through publishing case studies of Councils that have successfully used job-sharing in the past. Providing training for councillors, officials, and job-share partners on how to make job-sharing arrangements work effectively, including how to communicate the responsibilities of job-share partners within the Council and to the wider public could also be helpful.

Despite the remarkable benefits of job-sharing, uptake within Wales remains limited. At the time of writing this response only two principal councils in Wales were using it. Sharing success stories and increasing awareness could help address reservations, highlight potential benefits and encourage the wider use of job-sharing across principal councils in Wales.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Women's Equality Network (2024), *State of the Nation 2024*, <https://wenwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/SON-Report-2024.English.pdf>

Several interviewees also highlighted that, while expansion of job-sharing opportunities to other senior roles was a positive step, introducing election on the basis of job-sharing would have an even bigger impact, as this represents a significant bottleneck in enabling broader participation.

While we were unable to identify any international examples of election on the basis of job-sharing, previous attempts at standing job-sharing candidates were made for the Scottish parliamentary elections in 1999 and the UK General election in 2015.¹¹ Most recently, two independent women candidates announced their plans to run as a job-share for the Australian federal parliamentary election in 2025.¹²

2. Voting arrangements for nonexecutive job-share partners

Our view and that of the stakeholders we engaged is generally in agreement with the proposed voting arrangements and the need to set these out in guidance. While some felt that the default of job-sharing chairs voting against a proposal (if partners cannot agree and there is no vice-chair) might not be a perfect solution, we are not aware of a reasonable alternative, and it is expected that the circumstances in which this would arise will be very rare.

3. Job-share and the political balance of committees

We share the view that job-share arrangements should not impact upon political balance of committees. According to [Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989](#), local authorities must ensure that the composition of their committees reflects the political makeup of the council. This view was reflected by our interviewees.

Under normal circumstances, when job-share partners are from the same political party, there would be no impact on political balance calculations, as their combined representation would still align with the requirements of the Act. However, if job-share partners come from different political parties, this balance could be impacted and it is essential that this is managed carefully to ensure transparency, prevent conflicts, and protect the legitimacy of council decisions.

To facilitate this, the proposal that the approach to calculating the membership of the committee should be agreed by all parties seems sensible and this was echoed by stakeholders.

We agree that, in practice, the circumstances under which this arises are likely to be rare.

Conclusion

Women, especially those who face intersecting discrimination, have caring responsibilities or are socio-economically disadvantaged remain underrepresented in local government chambers and political leadership roles. This creates a pressing need to introduce effective measures that remove barriers to elected office and senior roles. Job-sharing can be a significant tool to help achieve this, as it offers flexibility that encourages more individuals to take on these demanding roles, while harbouring wider benefits for effective representation. The extension of job-sharing to non-executive roles within principal councils is an important step forward that can help ensure more individuals, councils and communities can benefit from

¹¹ Women's Equality Network (2022), *Job-Sharing For Senedd Members*, <https://wenwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Jobshare.WenWales-Final.pdf>

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/apr/21/double-or-nothing-australias-first-job-sharing-political-candidates-raise-constitutional-questions>

this. While the potential benefits of job-sharing are clear, uptake within Wales remains limited. By addressing potential challenges through clear guidance, providing opportunities for sharing best practice and raising awareness, more principal authorities could be encouraged to use job-sharing within their executive and non-executive roles. Expanding job-sharing further to enable election of job-sharing candidates would be a critical next step in creating a political system that better reflects the communities it serves.

For more information, please contact:

Inioluwa Longe
Policy and Research Officer
inioluwa@wenwales.org.uk

Dr Jessica Laimann
Policy & Public Affairs Manager
jessica@wenwales.org.uk