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DIVERSITY CASE STUDY | THE YOUNG COUNCILLOR EXPERIENCE BY RACHEL WALL



Background

The Diversity Commission was launched by NALC to support the growth of diversity in local councils. The Commission has begun work to look at ways for local councils to encourage every member of their community to get involved with what happens locally. As part of this work we are gaining evidence from diverse councillors to hear about their experiences of getting involved with their local council.

Our new series of Diversity Case Studies aim to give you an understanding of how to attract more diverse people to your local council.

This case study will focus on Rachel Wall, who currently works for De Montfort University Local Government Research Unit and became a parish councillor at the age of 22. It will look at how she got involved with her local parish council, why she found it an interesting prospect and the challenges she faced as a young councillor. Read about her experiences below.

How did you get involved?

Unfortunately, due to my age, some people don't believe me when I tell them I was a parish councillor at 22. I first got involved with my parish council in November 2014, a few months after I graduated from De Montfort University with a degree in Politics. I was approached by a family friend who sat on the parish council, encouraging me to put myself forward for co-option. During the 18 months I served on the council I was involved in commissioning youth services within the local joint committee area and setting up a new youth club for the village, which thankfully is still running to this day. This is down to the work of the parish council in taking the time to engage with young people and fostering talented individuals within the local community to train as youth officers.

Why did you get involved?

At first, I was reluctant as I wasn't sure I had the skills to be a parish councillor or that I would do a particularly good job, especially given that I had been living away from home during my time at university and I had never held a political office before (yes, the parish councillor is a political office!). What I actually found was that the skills that were really important were ones I already possessed; a knowledge of the local area, a passion to improve the community I had called home for most of my life and an enthusiasm to get things done!

What challenges did you face as a councillor?

There are huge time constraints on young people, with careers, education and family commitments to factor into their schedules – this is certainly something we learned when we spoke to young councillors during the course of the De Montfort University's Councillor Commission research. In spite of this, I would encourage more young people to get involved with their local council – they bring new thinking, fresh enthusiasm and an importantly unique perspective to their local council and have the opportunity to give something back to the communities they have grown up in. NALC's Diversity Commission is a really important piece of work which will hopefully encourage a more diverse demographic of local councillors. I definitely miss being a parish councillor – I might even do it again!



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