

8 MARCH 2018

## **DIVERSITY CASE STUDY | CLLR SOPHIA VAUGHAN-HODKINSON**

### **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 Cllr Sophia Vaughan-Hodkinson. She was coopted onto Hollinswood and Radlay Parish Council (Telford, Shropshire) in October 2016 at the age of 31. This case study will look at how she got involved with her parish council, the challenges she has faced and how she overcome them to achieve success on her parish council. Read about her experience below.

### **Why did I get involved?**

Originally, I moved to Telford after studying at Wolverhampton University for my BA in drama & performance and media & communication. Hollinswood centre I perceived to be a bit 'rundown', but as I continued to make the place home I saw how committed the community was to developing the area and rebuilding things such as the shopping area so that it is more open and inclusive to all. I wanted to get involved in maintaining this for future generations.

In addition, I also had the pleasure of attending events held by the parish council where the community gets together for celebrations like 'Fun Day'. This spurred me on to want to help maintain the cooperative community which I love living in.

### **Challenges**

At first, I felt like I had no idea what I was doing but several councillors guided me as well as our clerk and other members of staff who work for the parish. Being younger than most of the other councillors was not really a problem as they are all

used to treating people respectfully. It probably helps being a teacher too as I'm not exactly shy!

From a teacher's perspective, I would say that it might benefit councils to engage with the public by including it in the PSHE or citizenship work undertaken at schools. I would be happy to share my experiences with anyone.

Some of us are anonymous when it comes to the general public knowing who we are when out and about in the community. To aid people we published our images and contact details in the calendar.

Reading the multitude of emails can be time consuming but giving a few minutes a day to be informed before meetings is imperative to be able to make a difference with an informed opinion.

Occasionally I have not been recognised as a councillor due to not looking like a stereotypical councillor. My 'casual' dress is what most people would class a 'hippy' with colourful trousers and plaits in my hair which I began doing when I was in sixth form. When teaching my dress code does not change. I tend to dress more 'goth' or 'Victoriana' as the children have affectionately named me.

It is important that we accept differences and never judge based on what we see. Parish councils have to be open and acceptant if they are to attract a diverse audience!

## **Positives**

Giving up time to play such an important role has been rewarding in itself because I have seen the impact of the decisions we make as a parish council. For example, improving the buildings for those that use the venues for a range of activities. In particular, Randlay Community Centre has received a new sound system and insulation. The feedback received when putting on events like Fun Day, Fish and Chip bingo and so on is fantastic to hear and it is great to see that people of all ages, nationalities, and beliefs enjoy themselves on these types of days.

On a more personal level, meeting new people who I would now consider friends, has been great. Finding like-minded people who want the best for their community no matter what their political affiliation.

My vision for the future is to ensure that Hollinswood and Randlay are safe, cooperative, thriving and inclusive.