

From: PATRICK KITTERICK
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [Cllr Karen Pickering; Members-services](#)
Subject: Carers Allowance Proposal - Independent Remuneration Panel
Date: 08 November 2019 15:36:05

[REDACTED]

Please find below a proposal for the IRP, I am happy to meet with the IRP to elaborate on this proposal.

Thanks,

Patrick Kitterick

PRINCIPLE

Leicester City Council already accept the principle of paying for expenses in relation to councillors' caring responsibilities. This is in the sense that not only do some of the duties of councillors lead to a potential loss of income which is the reasoning behind the core allowance but that councillors with caring responsibilities may well have to go to extra expense in order to effectively carry out their duties.

A difficulty that has occurred is the onerous method of reclaiming caring expenses. The reality is that councillors have to justify every single caring claim with a council officer who judges whether the claim is allowable. This system does not recognise that councillors have a community leadership role and that does not restrict itself to a 9-5pm existence and in fact it almost dictates that the main thrust of this activity takes place outside of "business hours". Conflict has occurred around whether councillors' surgeries are claimable for childcare with claims for attending surgeries being turned down. Such surgeries and casework are a key part of our community leadership and representation remit whereas the council largely only recognises attendance at meetings which often is a minor part of our workload.

A SIMPLIFICATION PROPOSAL

In order to give flexibility for councillors and reduce bureaucracy for the council we propose a flat rate additional allowance to reflect the caring responsibilities some councillors carry.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

BENEFIT CRITERIA

The allowance would be available for any councillor who has a child and household receives Child Benefit.

The allowance would also be available for any councillor who would be eligible for the government's Carer's Credit i.e.

To get Carer's Credit you must be:

- aged 16 or over
- under [State Pension age](#)

looking after one or more people for at least 20 hours a week

The person you're looking after must get one of the following:

- Disability Living Allowance care component at the middle or highest rate
- Attendance Allowance
- Constant Attendance Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment - daily living component, at the standard or enhanced rate
- Armed Forces Independence Payment

If the person you're caring for doesn't get one of these benefits, you may still be able to get Carer's Credit. When you apply, fill in the 'Care Certificate' part of the application form and get a health or social care professional to sign it.

PAYING FOR CARE CRITERIA

Councillors would have to demonstrate that they make payments for care on a regular basis at an annual liaison with a council officer where their continuing benefit criteria eligibility would also be checked.

RATE OF ALLOWANCE

Upon the principle that the council should pay for an average of 3 hours care at £10 per hour the annual allowance would come to £1560 per annum.

CLOSING REMARKS

If Leicester City Council values the input of people with caring responsibilities as councillors then it must cater for the needs of such councillors. For many years carers have been under-represented at the highest levels of the council and this modest proposal goes a small way to redress this balance.

Leicester City Council
Independent Remuneration Panel
Review of Members' Allowances
November 2019

Aide Memoire for Interviews and Written Submissions

The Council's statutory Independent Remuneration Panel will be meeting on 15 November 2019 and 3rd December 2019 to review the Members' Allowances Scheme in accordance with the '4-year rule'.

It is important for the Panel to ensure that all Members can raise any issues they wish to be considered during this review. Consequently, this aide memoire is being sent to every Member seeking their opinion on the current scheme and possible areas for revision.

While the name of all interviewees and respondents will be listed in an appendix to the report Members making a specific point will not be named in the report, nor will Members making a written submission be identified in any other way. However, submissions are subject to FOI and if a Member wishes to make an anonymous written submission on paper please place in an envelope and hand in to the Member and Civic Support Team marked "For IRP".

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. The Panel is asking for individual Members' views. You may not have a view on all issues raised or, simply consider there is no need for change to the existing allowances.

Please return any written submissions to the Panel via [REDACTED] Democratic & Civic Support Manager ([REDACTED]@leicester.gov.uk) no later than Monday 11th November 2019 please.

Please sign / insert your name: Cllr Jacky Nangreave

Position(s) you hold as a city councillor: Vice Chair Housing Scrutiny

1. Basic Allowance (£10,767 2019/20)

(a) Is there case to revise the Basic Allowance? If so, why?

The allowance should be reviewed regularly. I don't think it's being reviewed too often.

(b) What should the Basic Allowance be?

I only joined the council in May and I know other councils have different arrangements. I came in on this arrangement and I have made financial arrangements based on my income from the council, so I wouldn't like to see it decreased.

2. **Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)**

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Assistant City Mayors (Currently there are 6 Assistant City Mayors, 1 receives £20,898 and 5 receive £11,414)*	Rate i £18,040 or Rate ii £14,430 or Rate iii £10,823*	
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Chair Standards Committee	£3,033	
Minority Group Leader (currently not paid)	£1,134 + £284 per member	
Majority Group Whip	£8,502	

*The City Mayor can and has chosen to vary from the specified SRAs for the Deputy and Assistant City Mayors provided any variance does not result in the combined total allowances for these roles exceeding the total allocated budget for other Executive SRAs.

(a) Would you change any of the SRAs currently payable either:

No comment

(i) Relative to other SRAs/roles currently payable or

(ii) In monetary terms

(b) Are any particular issues you wish to raise in regard to SRAs currently payable e.g., should any SRAs be discontinued?

3. **Other Posts not currently remunerated**

(a) Are there any other posts which should be paid a SRA?

No comment

(b) If so, why and/or at what level?

4. **Other Allowances**

(a) Do you consider any changes are needed to any other allowances namely:

(i) Travel & Subsistence Allowances

a. Inside the City - £1,205 payable to all Members

b. Outside the City and overnight accommodation and out of pocket expenses - claimable allowances (HMRC Mileage & Officer Subsistence rates – details found on the scheme at schedule 1 of the allowances scheme -

<https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/181914/members-allowance-scheme-2019-2020.pdf>)

(ii) Carer's allowances (Child Care capped at minimum wage for age of carer + Other Dependents at hourly rate for Home Care Assistant
The allowance should cover the cost of childcare for all councillor activities ie. a percentage of the councillor allowance so it rises with greater responsibility.

(iii) Telecommunications & Support Allowance (£318 per year)

(iv) Co-opted Members Allowance (£539)

(v) Civic Allowances

Lord Mayor	£17,571	
Deputy Lord Mayor	£5,384	
High Bailiff	£1,884	

*£11,900 of the Lord Mayor's allowance is provided by allowances with £5,671 administered via Democratic & Members Support Manager

(b) Are there other costs the Panel needs to consider?

5. **Indexation of Allowances**

(a) Should allowances continue to be indexed?

6. **Any Other Issues**

(a) Are there any other issues which you consider the Panel should take into account when reviewing the Members' Allowances Scheme?

7. **Priority for this Review**

(a) What is the main issue for this review to address? In your view what is the most pressing change that is required?

Thank you for your assistance.

Declan Hall

Chair of Leicester City Council Independent Remuneration Panel

Leicester City Council
Independent Remuneration Panel
Review of Members' Allowances
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Please return any written submissions to the Panel via [REDACTED] Democratic & Civic Support Manager ([REDACTED]@leicester.gov.uk) no later than Monday 11th November 2019 please.

Please sign / insert your name: Nita M Solanki

Position(s) you hold as a city councillor: Member: Neighbourhood and Environmental services

1. Basic Allowance (£10,767 2019/20)

(a) Is there case to revise the Basic Allowance? If so, why?

(b) What should the Basic Allowance be?

2. **Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)**

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- (i) Relative to other SRAs/roles currently payable or
 - (ii) In monetary terms
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 - (i) Travel & Subsistence Allowances
 - a. Inside the City - £1,205 payable to all Members
 - b. Outside the City and overnight accommodation and out of pocket expenses - claimable allowances (HMRC Mileage & Officer Subsistence rates – details found on the scheme at schedule 1 of the allowances scheme - <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/181914/members-allowance-scheme-2019-2020.pdf>)
 - (ii) Carer's allowances (Child Care capped at minimum wage for age of carer + Other Dependents at hourly rate for Home Care Assistant
- The panel needs to consider the carers allowance aspect in regards to what is eligible to be claimed for. Currently ward surgeries are not eligible to input a claim for. However the venue for the surgeries and all the administration is organised by the Council. Holding ward surgeries are not a political aspect of the role and is a key part of supporting the electorate/constituent.
- (iii) Telecommunications & Support Allowance (£318 per year)
 - (iv) Co-opted Members Allowance (£539)

(v) Civic Allowances

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(b) Are there other costs the Panel needs to consider?

5. **Indexation of Allowances**

(a) Should allowances continue to be indexed?

6. **Any Other Issues**

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Thank you for your assistance.

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Please sign / insert your name: Susan Barton

Position(s) you hold as a city councillor:

Chair of Standards
Member of Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Sports Scrutiny Commission
Corporate Parenting Committee
Heritage Partnership panel member
Governor of Wyggeston's Hospital
Trustee of Project Hive (Western Ward Community Enterprise)
Trustee of Leicester Children's Holidays charity
Planning Committee (until last May)

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority Member

Various local community groups in my ward

Local Government Association Member Peer

1. **Basic Allowance (£10,767 2019/20)**

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(b) What should the Basic Allowance be?

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(i) Relative to other SRAs/roles currently payable or

(ii) In monetary terms

(b) Are any particular issues you wish to raise in regard to SRAs currently payable e.g., should any SRAs be discontinued?

I am not going to comment on the amount of an SRA. What is an important factor to consider is that having an SRA can give a councillor the financial freedom to be able to take on more additional work in their community and in the city which otherwise they might not be able to do if they had to go to work.

3. **Other Posts not currently remunerated**

(a) Are there any other posts which should be paid a SRA?

(b) If so, why and/or at what level?

4. **Other Allowances**

(a) Do you consider any changes are needed to any other allowances namely:

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(b) Are there other costs the Panel needs to consider?

5. **Indexation of Allowances**

(a) Should allowances continue to be indexed?

Yes

6. **Any Other Issues**

(a) Are there any other issues which you consider the Panel should take into account when reviewing the Members' Allowances Scheme?

I am chair of the Standards Committee. The role is different from other chairs as much of the work happens behind the scenes. Due to its nature, there is a need for discretion and a sense of fairness, coupled with an understanding of the role and expectations

demanding in public life and service as a councillor. It is difficult to predict what meetings and work may be needed, as this depends on whether any complaints have been received and whether, after an initial investigation, further enquiries and action need to be taken decided upon during a hearing. Last year there were two serious cases which because of their nature were stressful to deal with. This year I hope there will be none. The full meetings of the Committee which I chair are composed of a majority of independent people from outside the Council and so have to be conducted in a professional manner. The role also involves proposing a biannual report to Full Council, by preparing and presenting a speech explaining its contents.

I am happy to discuss the role with you, if it would help you gain a clearer understanding.

7. **Priority for this Review**

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Please sign / insert your name: Melissa March

Position(s) you hold as a city councillor: Vice Chair ASC scrutiny

Basic Allowance (£10,767 2019/20)

(a) Is there case to revise the Basic Allowance? If so, why?

The allowance is not a motivating or demotivating factor for me personally.

(b) What should the Basic Allowance be?

Enough to attract considered, hardworking people from a diverse range of backgrounds to reflect the city of Leicester. Not enough to attract people who do not want to do the job with integrity. Perhaps it is a good balance currently.

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 - (ii) Carer's allowances (Child Care capped at minimum wage for age of carer + Other Dependents at hourly rate for Home Care Assistant

 - I do consider that this needs to change in a variety of ways, both in terms of practically how it is delivered and in terms of how we make this available to members. The main reasons for this are two fold: A) the city of Leicester is a diverse place and we want to attract people from all walks of life and backgrounds to become our elected members (it is notable that dependent carers' allowance will particularly affect women); and B) the current guidelines and practice are grossly outdated and need to be revised. I will make full comments about this below.

 - (iii) Telecommunications & Support Allowance (£318 per year)

 - (iv) Co-opted Members Allowance (£539)

(v) Civic Allowances

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(b) Are there other costs the Panel needs to consider?

4. **Indexation of Allowances**

(a) Should allowances continue to be indexed?

Yes

5. **Any Other Issues**

(a) Are there any other issues which you consider the Panel should take into account when reviewing the Members' Allowances Scheme?

6. **Priority for this Review**

(a) What is the main issue for this review to address? In your view what is the most pressing change that is required?

Dependent Carers' Allowance

I am proud to stand alongside councillors from a wide range of different backgrounds elected to represent our city. This is the first time we have had almost 50% female councillors. I am also proud of the diversity of our backgrounds, for example, age and ethnicity too.

However, this diversity is not without challenges for some individual members so we should aim to support them, ensuring a level playing field on which our team of elected members can carry out their role to the best of their ability. As part of this, we need to recognise that dependent carers may need some additional support and that the current allowance in this area provided by the local authority is not sufficient for them. My concerns are listed below.

This part of the remuneration scheme for councillors has not been revised or reconsidered since 2003 and so the current policy is out of date. For example, it mentions vouchers, which no longer exist for many parents as most applicants now use the tax free childcare scheme. Furthermore, the current policy is focused on those with school age children, not carers of adults or pre school aged children. Thus, it assumes an availability of dependent carers with some need for additional childcare on top, rather than a basis of zero childcare and the need to purchase everything. It also does not recognise the specific needs of single parents, parents of multiple children, kinship carers and parents of disabled children, which are issues that the current cohort of councillors between us are facing.

For all dependent carers, it is not practical to bring children along to meetings. There are multiple reasons for this including safety, safeguarding, ensuring constituents have the best possible support and allowing councillors to concentrate on the role that they are elected to do. And so childcare is a must, not an aspiration, particularly for younger children.

Given the rising vitriolic nature of our political discourse, I do not think it is at all appropriate for public figures to have to advertise where they will be and when, whilst also having to take their children along with them because of the limitation of childcare provision.

The current policy discriminates against those with more than one child as it limits to just a set number of hours per councillor, rather than considering that an elected member may be responsible for multiple children. This is can work in a babysitting post school scenario but is not appropriate for every occasion.

The inconsistency of guidelines across the UK leaves too much room for interpretation by a local authority. The LGA has examples of other councils who interpret the law differently, as well as good practice guidance from an equality perspective. I would like the panel to adopt a new policy based on the LGA example, and also to advise on how we can implement in practice a policy that is more inclusive of dependent carers at Leicester city council.

For example, the current practice categorises as political many things that are not, eg surgeries. All councillors across the city and across all parties run these surgeries and council officers facilitate them in doing so by booking venues and publicising them. The ability to meet residents face to face is a vital part of our democracy and how local authority members interact with citizens. As a result of these awkward, and incorrect, definitions of political and non political work, the current practice of this policy feels “nit picking” or “penny pinching”, and onerous. For example, is accessing IT support the work of the authority, or not? What about an emergency call to a safeguarding team? Or the ability to represent residents at a planning committee hearing? And what if the childcare a member purchases does not fit into the required “by the hour” tick box system because, for example, of minimum time limits or a nursery requiring an ongoing weekly day basis of booking? We are disadvantaging carers (who are predominantly but not exclusive women) if we do not allow them to perform on the same terms as their counterparts.

Another problem is that having gone through the process and made a claim for the exact amount, and showing receipts to prove this, members are then taxed on the reimbursement they are given too. It is treated as a benefit, not an expense. As a result of this and the above information, I would request that the panel considers whether a fixed flat fee system would be time and energy saving for both members and democratic support services. If necessary, this could be banded and be based upon the ages, numbers, disability, single parent and other specific needs of the family. A system working in this way (like with our telecommunications and travel allowances) would be far more simple and efficient to administrate, as well as preventing those who need some dependent carers allowance in order to carry out the tasks that they were elected to do did not feel that they were on the take in some way or another as a result of this.

Thank you for your assistance.

Declan Hall

Chair of Leicester City Council Independent Remuneration Panel

Independent Remuneration Panel – Representation Karen Pickering
Nov 11th 2019

I am a new councillor who was elected in May 2019 on the principal that I could apply for out of pocket expenses of which 20hrs per week childcare was included in the 'Becoming a councillor' literature, however it has proven to be near on impossible as the task is onerous and laborious. I am very proud to be one of the almost 50% of female councillors elected to LCC and the diversity in both age and sex is a testament to the commitment to equality of the Labour selection process.

However the de facto remuneration with regard to childcare is making it so difficult financially that I am having to seriously consider resigning my role as a councillor. If councils are to be representative of the communities they serve systems must function in order to facilitate entry by those of us who have caring responsibilities. I do understand that this is a part time role and that the remuneration is one of supplementing childcare expenses but many of the hours fall outside of the normal 9-5 and is therefore a complicated task to claim. In all of my monthly childcare claims I have never been able to claim for more than 12hrs in one month and it would appear it is impossible to claim for 20hrs a week under the current restrictions.

I am also aware that there is a concern that the childcare element of Councillors expenses is totalled together alongside their other expenses and is a public document that is available for scrutiny by members of the public and as such can show as being overinflated. Other Local Authorities have chosen to separate the childcare element from the mainstream expenses so that the general public can see clearly for themselves that this Councillor has caring responsibilities.

I understand that in the past many councillors have taken their school age children to meetings and in particular ward surgeries. However, this has been proven recently not to be a safe place for children in the current political climate. Many of our constituents are in a state of upset when they attend surgeries and as such it is not a suitable environment for young children. The ability to meet councillors face to face is part of our democracy and I would not consider this as being party political but a significant part of our role but the council deem this not to be the case. I am representing the City Council, not the Labour Party.

The Local Government Association (LGA) deem paying childcare for surgeries and case work is an integral part of being a councillor and guidelines state that councillors should be able to claim childcare for these elements of the role. The issue of interpretation of such guidelines for the dependant allowance claim is left to individual council officers and has been proven to be inconsistent across the UK when the LGA clearly states that such claims should be universal.

I would like the panel to consider adding the childcare element as a block sum along with other expenses that are paid in such a way as this would render the officer interpretation unnecessary and give each councillor the equal opportunity stated in the LGA guidelines. I understand that this would mean proving that you qualify for such a sum and that there is evidence that such childcare is being paid for in advance.

The Local Government Information Unit has researched the role of women in local government positions and whilst the issue of childcare is not just a women's responsibility it does seem to be predominantly female councillors it affects. As one of the 5 councillors that need childcare in order to do justice to this role The Fawcett Report 'Does Local Government Work for Women' has been an eyeopener. The report provides an in-depth study of how improving diversity and removing structural barriers to progress brings forth real change for the better and real equality. I have included the report for your information.

The Fawcett Report P35 - 37

Childcare and caring costs must be covered

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government should issue guidance to the existing local independent remuneration panels to promote our model for a comprehensive dependent carers' allowance scheme so that all childcare and adult dependent care costs are covered.

Key elements of a model dependent carers' allowance scheme

- *Cover actual costs for Ofsted-registered care, and for professional home carers for adult dependents*
- *Pay for informal care, such as a babysitter, at a minimum of the applicable Real Living Wage*
- *Permit councillors to claim for care for multiple dependents for the same period of time*

- *Do not exclude councillors who receive Carers Allowance from claiming.*
- *Do not artificially limit the amount that councillors can claim over a period of time*
- *Cover all council related business, using regulation 7(h) of The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 which permits payments to cover 'the carrying out of any other duty approved by the authority, or any duty of a class so approved, for the purpose of, or in connection with, the discharge of the functions of the authority or any of its committees or sub-committees.'*

"Many women are struggling with childcare and the meetings (often early evening) are difficult if you have young children. I have also found that most female colleagues do not claim the childcare allowance which is on offer for fear of it being used against them politically."

White British Conservative woman county councillor, 3

150 YEARS
Fawcett ▶
Equality. It's about time.



**Does Local
Government
Work for Women?**

**Final Report of the
Local Government Commission**

July 2017

LGiU
the local democracy think tank



**Barrow
Cadbury
Trust**

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FOREWORD – THE COMMISSION CO-CHAIRS



Dame Margaret Hodge MP

I led a Council 25 years ago and I am shocked at how little progress has been made, to make local government work for women. Women's representation has barely increased, far outstripped by the pace of change in Parliament. Councillors still do not have maternity rights. Sexism remains rife.

My party is moving in the right direction when it comes to getting women elected as councillors, but still far too few make it to the top. That is because the way councils do business has been designed by, and for, men. The fact that not a single one of our new metro mayors is a woman shows the eventual impact that this has – we end up with rooms full of men making decisions that affect women's lives.

But it has been heartening, throughout the course of this commission, to see women coming together across party lines to talk about their experiences. Their eagerness to fight for change, and the huge impact they have in their communities despite the barriers they face, is an inspiration. We need more women like them as councillors, to make local democracy more diverse and more effective.

This report is an opportunity. If councils, parties, central government and local communities work together to implement its recommendations, we can make our town halls fit for the future.



Gillian Keegan MP

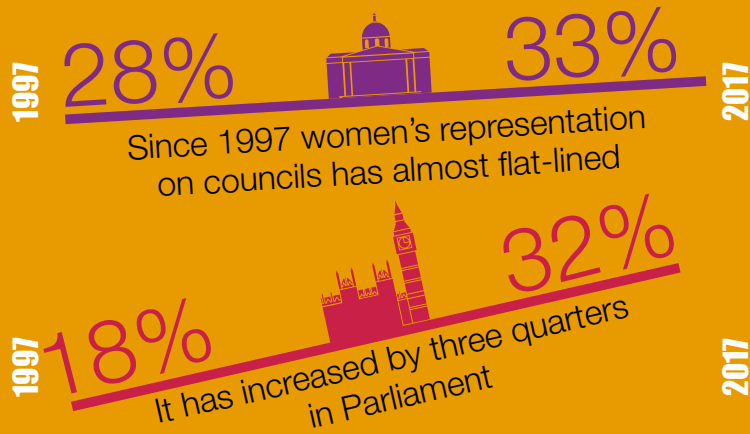
Being a councillor has so much to recommend it. It presents an opportunity for real responsibility, to make a positive impact on the lives of others, and to gain valuable experience. To shift the dial on women's representation, the whole of local government, from the Local Government Association to individual parties, needs to get out there and sell the merits of the role – in particular, to younger people and working people.

But if we want them to take an interest, it is vital that we change how local government works. I came on to my local council from over two decades in the corporate world, and the biggest challenge I faced was how inflexible it was. Things like remote working, which are absolutely normal in the business world, are unavailable to councillors.

Alongside better support for women with children or other caring roles, improving the use of tech has the potential to dramatically change how the job is done and make it a great option for many more people.

If we build the pipeline of women who want to stand, and bring them in by changing the way councils work, the targets that we are calling for parties to adopt will be within reach.

Getting women in



Where are the women in devolution?



None
of the six metro mayors are women



Just 12%
of devolution cabinet members are women

Change on councils is too slow



At the current rate of progress it will take English county councils **48 years** for us to reach equality

Women council leaders

Fewer than **1/5** council leaders are women



6 in 7 of the council cabinet jobs that lead to the top go to men

Tackling sexism

33% of women councillors have experienced sexist comments from other councillors

!&£@*

Making councils more diverse

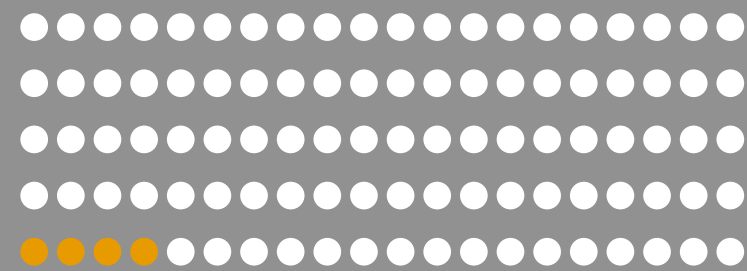


1/2 of disabled women councillors experience multiple discrimination

BAME women councillors face racism and sexism



Supporting parents on councils



Only 4% have a formal maternity, paternity, or adoption policy in place for councillors



Getting to the top

Just **33%** of council chief executives are **women**

78% of council officers are **women**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local government spends £94bn each year: it plays a vital role in providing services on which we all depend and tackling the challenges we all confront, and it is changing fast. Budgets have been cut significantly since 2010, the powers councils exercise are changing, and devolution will see an increasing shift of power and decision-making to regional level. Women are more likely to rely on the services that councils provide, and make up 78 percent of the workforce, so they should be properly represented in decision-making positions. But this is not the case.

Just one in three councillors in England is a woman, up only 5 percentage points in two decades. In the devolved regions, all of the six elected metro mayors are men. Just 12 percent of combined authority representatives are women. Within this male-dominated environment, our interim report surveyed women councillors and found that they are held back by structural and cultural barriers, facing sexism from fellow councillors, including in the public council chamber, and sexism within the party political structures. The culture, practices and protocols of local government create unnecessary barriers to participation for women with caring responsibilities. We have found an outdated culture which holds local government back – and which now must modernise to be fit for purpose in the 21st century.

This report builds on survey data published in our interim report, and brings together the voices of the hundreds of women and men, councillors and council leaders, officers, and members of the public who took part in our year-long Commission, along with new desk analysis of the structures and policies that govern town halls.

The Commission has looked at all the aspects and stages of the process, from first becoming a candidate to becoming the leader of a council. We make a series of recommendations that would bring more women into local government and help them to play a full role at all levels. If implemented they will begin to make local government work for women.

Collecting the data

To tackle the problem of gender inequality on councils, we need to be able to measure it. Our commission has done so. But this should not be the responsibility of the third sector – Government must collect this data. A change to the law is needed now, so that political parties and civil society can monitor progress and push for equality.

Collect and report diversity monitoring data – enact & amend Section 106

Data on the make-up of local council candidates and councillors must be collected in a uniform format. This can be achieved by enacting Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010; amending it to include local government as a relevant election, and to place the responsibility to collect data on local councils rather than political parties. This data should be centrally collated and published by the Electoral Commission, and must include protected characteristics like age, ethnicity, and disability.

Getting more women in

Local elections in May 2017 saw next to no progress in the number of women councillors elected since those councils last went to the polls. Just 33 percent of all councillors in England, and 28 percent of councillors in Wales, are women. At the current rate of progress in English county councils it will take 48 years for us to reach gender parity. In Welsh councils it would take 82 years. We cannot wait that long.

Evidence from all over the world demonstrates that quotas are effective at getting more women in and the Fawcett Society remains committed to the use of time-limited quotas to increase women's representation, particularly where, as in this case, progress has stalled. But not all political parties support them currently, so the commission did not reach a unanimous view.

So we call for all political parties to set out targets, and a clear action plan, to push for gender equality with significant progress achieved by the time of the next general election. If that progress is not achieved, we believe the case for a minimum requirement of women candidates will be made, and call for parties to commit to early legislation.

Incumbency on local councils disproportionately benefits men and acts as a significant barrier to change. Tackling it calls for radical measures – we propose a four term limit for councillors, allowing for a two term lead-in period to give fair notice of the change.

Unless we build a pipeline of women who want to stand, we will not be able to achieve equality. We need to do more to encourage women to stand, and better information about the work and impact of being a councillor should be provided. Women told us they fear that they would struggle to make a difference if they stood – but women councillors tell us they have had more impact than they expected. We call on the LGA to put significant resources into expanding their councillor recruitment work, and promoting and encouraging women should be the focus of this work in the 2018 centenary year of women getting the vote. Individual councils, and local parties and associations, need to reach out into the community to actively ask women to stand.

Abuse and harassment, including on social media, impacts on women's decisions to run for office. Local police and councils need to work with all future council candidates to ensure that the full force of the law is brought to bear when candidates are targeted with illegal abuse or harassment.

Set targets, make progress, or legislate

Each political party must outline realistic but ambitious targets for increasing women's representation at each year's round of local elections, with a clear action plan for achieving those targets

If each political party has not made significant progress against this plan to increase women's representation in local government by the next general election, they must commit to early legislation to implement a time-limited requirement for at least 45 percent of local government candidates to be women.

Term limits for councillors

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government should introduce a term limit for councillors to promote turnover and tackle the problem that more men tend to remain councillors for longer, limiting the opportunities for women to stand. We recommend a limit of four terms, or sixteen years. This should be introduced with a lead-in time of two terms, or eight years, to give existing councillors time to achieve their aims. The first councillors to stand down as a result would be in 2025.

Political parties to issue guidance on sex discrimination

Political parties should issue guidance to local parties on the actions they should take to make their activities accessible to people with caring responsibilities, who are still more likely to be women; and the guidance should ensure there is no sex discrimination in the selection of candidates.

LGA 'Be a councillor' to focus on women's representation in suffrage centenary year 2018

The Local Government Association (LGA) should focus 'Be A Councillor' activity in the 2018 centenary year of women getting the vote on women's representation. The LGA should put significant additional resources into a proactive campaign to deliver cross-party, local events to encourage more women to consider getting involved and standing to be a councillor.

Local authorities to work with police to tackle abuse of council candidates

Local authorities should work with local police forces to ensure that women council candidates understand the legal protection available against online and offline abuse and harassment, and that they can quickly report it in the knowledge that they will be taken seriously.

Improving diversity

The women who are elected to councils are not representative of women in England and Wales as a whole. BAME women, disabled women, and younger women are underrepresented, and experience significant discrimination.

Councils need to put in place reasonable adjustment policies to specifically set out how they will meet the needs of disabled women councillors, and government needs to reintroduce financial support to help disabled women with the costs of candidature. Parties and councils need to change how they run meetings, and parties need to look at how they evaluate what a 'good councillor' is, to become more inclusive and accessible.

Through our consultation, we heard that many women from BAME backgrounds experience racist comments from other councillors, and additional exclusion from the 'old boys networks' that close out all women – it takes an even thicker skin to stay on as a councillor in the face of multiple discrimination. Giving evidence to our Commission, Muslim women councillors in particular described pressure not to engage with politics from men within their community. Senior local government figures need to be more willing to respond and challenge this alongside those women.

Reasonable adjustment policies for disabled councillors

All local authorities should introduce reasonable adjustments policies for disabled councillors so that access to legal entitlements is not subject to discretion.

Access to elected office fund to be reopened

The Government should re-open the Access to Elected Office fund to ensure that disabled women councillors do not face avoidable barriers to being a candidate.

Parties to review how councillor performance is assessed

Political parties should review how councillor performance is assessed at the local level to ensure that disabled women are not disadvantaged by a reliance on inaccessible public engagement methods and working environments to come to a judgement.

Challenge racism and support BAME and Muslim women

Political parties need to take positive action measures to enable and encourage more BAME women councillors to be selected, and local government leaders need to support Muslim women who experience pressure from within their communities not to participate in political life.

The standards panel system and code of conduct outlined elsewhere in this report for combatting sexist behaviour must also be made to work for other protected characteristics, including ethnicity and disability.

Data collection must also allow us to understand the full diversity of women in local government.

Removing structural barriers to progress

Because town halls have for so long been male-dominated, the way they have evolved to do business does not support women, who still have the bulk of caring responsibilities, to stand, stay in office, and to progress. Women councillors experience patchy provision for maternity, childcare, and flexible working – access to this vital support should be a right, not a matter of luck.

We found some councils that do not cover the costs of childcare or dependent care at all, and many who offer inflexible or unnecessarily limited support. This causes women to struggle financially and in some cases stand down as councillors. Even when allowances are reasonable, the way they are reported can deter women from claiming.

Most councils do not have any maternity, paternity, adoption or parental leave policies in place for councillors across England, and our Freedom of Information request found that **only 12 councils**, just 4 percent of those responding, have any kind of formal policy in place. While some have informal arrangements, three quarters offer

nothing. We heard of women who had been told they would lose their cabinet positions when having a baby. This is completely unacceptable. We call on Government to introduce a nationwide policy and end this scandal.

Many women councillors face significant barriers from the inflexibility of meeting times, and almost two thirds of women councillors feel that changing this will bring more women in. Much more needs to be done to ensure all councillors' views are taken into account when meetings take place and how councillors are expected to work.

Technology is a key part of the solution, allowing more efficient use of people's time, and allowing more people who work full time or have caring responsibilities to participate. But at present, the law does not allow councillors to remotely attend or vote at meetings, through applications such as Skype. This too needs to change.

Introduce maternity, paternity and parental leave entitlements for councillors across England

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government should introduce a statutory England-wide, comprehensive maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave policy for councillors. This should be in line with leave available to employees, and ensure that cabinet members continue to receive their allowances

Extend leave provision in Wales to 12 months.

The Welsh Government should extend Welsh local government's maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave policy to be in line with the leave available to employees

Childcare and caring costs must be covered

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government should issue guidance to the existing local independent remuneration panels to promote our model for a comprehensive dependent carers' allowance scheme so that all childcare and adult dependent care costs are covered.

Change childcare expenses reporting so that councillors can claim

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government should change the law so that councillors' childcare expenses are reported separately to the main Members' Allowances data, so that reporting of them does not deter women from claiming support.

Legalise remote attendance at council meetings and use technology to support inclusion

The Secretary of State should change the law so that remote attendance at meetings, including voting rights, is possible through Skype or other technological solutions. Councils should be required to proactively offer this to their councillors.

The Welsh Government should proactively encourage councils to offer remote attendance to their councillors

Consult on meeting times to better meet the needs of those with caring responsibilities or disabled people

Council members' services teams should regularly survey councillors to identify the most mutually convenient meeting times for all members involved in meetings, and when setting meeting times should make sure councillors with caring responsibilities and disabled councillors are not excluded.

Challenging sexism and changing council culture

We have found that there is a harmful culture of sexism in parts of local government politics which would not be out of place in the 1970s. Written and oral evidence to the commission repeatedly described a culture where sexism is tolerated, and viewed as part of political life. This has to change. This evidence is supported by the results of our large-scale survey which found that almost 4 in 10 women councillors have had sexist remarks directed at them by other councillors. Women need the tools to combat this, with a formal commitment to equality in councillors' codes of conduct; and we need a commitment from all the political parties to provide leadership to effect change.

Councillor codes of conduct vary, and there is no requirement for them to promote equality or prohibit sex discrimination. Following the abolition of Standards for England in 2012 there is no requirement for councils to have a formal standards committee, or any higher power to appeal to if complaints against a councillor are not handled properly. We conclude that formal standards committees, with a duty to promote equality and with real teeth, are needed in all councils so that women can challenge sexism and harassment.

Alongside direct sexism we heard repeatedly about the way that male councillors often silence women's voices or appropriate their ideas. Our research provides evidence of a macho, combative culture in many council chambers, which holds women back from contributing, and is also a barrier to efforts to encourage more (and more diverse) women to stand.

Achieving cultural change is always a challenge. We need more women in local government to help to drive forward the culture change, supported by their male allies. But we also need specific action which involves setting out acceptable standards, providing appropriate training, and ensuring transparency so that behaviour can be effectively monitored.

Standards committees to suspend then deselect councillors who sexually harass council colleagues, staff or the public

It should not be possible for a councillor to continue to represent a political party, nor to hold elected office if they are found to have sexually harassed someone. If a councillor is accused of sexual harassment they should be suspended pending investigation by the Standards Committee, then deselected if the allegations are upheld.

Codes of conduct to address sexism and discrimination

Local authorities should make clear in their codes of conduct that councillor behaviour is governed by the prohibition on sex discrimination in the Equality Act 2010. Codes of conduct must be changed to include a requirement for councillors to promote equality in their actions and behaviour.

Standards committees to be established

Local authorities should be required to establish a formal standards committee, elected by full council on an annual basis, representative of party political make-up, and with a clear process for individuals to make complaints. The Secretary of State should change the law so that these committees have the power to suspend councillors as an ultimate sanction. The Secretary of State should open discussions with the LGA on establishing a higher arbiter of appeals against local standards committee decisions.

Establish a role with authority to oversee member conduct

Local authorities should establish a formal role to oversee member conduct and promoting equality in their next constitution review. Some councils have used the Chief Whip for this role; the chair of the formal standards committee may also be appropriate

Standards, training, and transparency

With clear standards in place, councils should provide councillors with appropriate training to tackle discrimination, and enable transparency through publishing audio recordings in order to monitor behaviour.

Helping her – networks, mentoring, and building confidence

Women councillors are less likely to be involved in the informal networks within local government where real power lies. There is a clear need to provide opportunities for women, and men who support gender equality, to network, develop, and campaign together, including to get more women in, across political and councillor/officer lines.

We also heard a clear message that women councillors value local mentoring schemes, and want to see more of them. Councils must build on work that is already happening to ensure all women councillors are offered support from other councillors who will actively sponsor them to progress.

Provide active sponsorship of new councillors

All local authorities should introduce active sponsorship schemes for all new councillors, and ensure women councillors are encouraged to take them up, to help them progress.

Establish regional gender equality networks

We call for the establishment of regional, cross-party, gender equality networks open to councillors and officers. These would build informal networks, and support women and allies to challenge the structures and cultures that hold women back in town halls. Fawcett and the LGiU plan to lead in setting these up.

Leadership – Councillors

Women make up just 17 percent of council leaders, one in four directly elected mayors, and four of the 22 Welsh leaders.

We need to address the barriers that women face in the route to the top, which is often through cabinet or committee chair roles. Women comprise 30 percent of cabinet members overall – but many of these are in councils where there already is a woman leader. Women are particularly badly represented in cabinet roles in councils led by men. Nine councils still have all-male cabinets. Just one in seven Finance or Economic Development roles are held by women. To tackle this unacceptable situation, we call for all councils, led by political parties, to adopt a constitutional requirement for at least 50 percent of those in cabinet or chair roles to be women.

Women leaders tell us that they value the support provided by the LGA, but more needs to be done to identify and support potential women leaders, as many take on their roles following a crisis or a vacancy rather than challenging the status quo of male leadership.

Adopt a requirement for gender balanced leadership

Local authorities must adopt within their constitution a requirement for at least 50 percent of cabinet members, and chairs of committees, to be women. Political parties must adopt this as their national policy.

Create new leadership roles & support women into leadership positions

Local authorities should consider introducing assistant or deputy cabinet member roles, filled on a gender equal basis, so that women are enabled to develop the skills and knowledge to take on leadership roles.

Proactively seek out and target women councillors for leadership programmes

The LGA should continue to actively seek out women councillors who could take on leadership roles through training and mentoring programmes, and ensure that its structures and public presence are gender balanced.

Leadership – Officers

The local government workforce is overwhelmingly female, yet at the top male Chief Executives outnumber women two to one. Women council officers highlight the culture amongst politicians at the top of councils, and the failure to promote genuine flexible working, as the root of this waste of women's talents.

More councils must join the 46 percent who advertise jobs as flexible working – and all councils must make all of their senior roles flexible by default. The local government gender equality networks we propose would enable more solidarity between women officers and councillors – but once again, cultural change needs more women councillors and council leaders.

Open up all senior roles to flexible working or part-time by default

Local authorities should offer all roles, including senior roles, as flexible working and part-time by default, unless there is a clear business case otherwise. This must be backed up by a genuine organizational commitment to viewing flexible working on equal terms with traditional working patterns.

Local authority gender equality networks to include women officers

Local authorities must support the development of gender equality networks so that councillor allies can support women local government officers in challenging sexism that they experience.

Devolution

The new structures of devolution represent a chance to improve the performance on gender equality – but that chance is currently being missed. All of the metro mayors are male. 9 in 10 seats at the top table of Combined Authorities are occupied by men. This stands in stark contrast to the principles which informed devolution in Wales and saw 50:50 representation in the Assembly. It is unacceptable in the 21st century for new, powerful institutions to be created with no regard for gender equality or diversity, and which instead cement existing structures that have failed to meaningfully include women.

The Government needs to change the structure of the combined authorities so that councils elect two representatives to them, one of which must be a woman. Mayors need to create interim structures to get more women around the table.

Combined Authorities must work fast to establish mechanisms to bring grassroots women in city regions into policy debates, and overcome pale, male, and stale decision-making.

Equal representation across combined authorities.

Women should be equally represented at the top table. Where councils send two representatives to Combined Authorities, at least one of them should be a woman. The Secretary of State should amend all Combined Authorities' constitutions so that each constituent authority appoints two members.

Permit all-women shortlists for metro mayor elections

The Government should amend legislation to allow political parties to use all-women shortlists for metro mayoral elections. Political parties should take a strategic view across the next round of mayoral elections to ensure that women candidates are put forward in winnable races.

Women and equalities committees in combined authorities

Combined Authorities should establish Women and Equalities Committees, chaired by a cabinet portfolio holder, which will develop locally appropriate mechanisms for engaging with civil society and ensuring a diverse range of women's voices are heard.

Equality impact assessments used to inform decision-making

Combined Authorities must ensure that relevant decisions include a full, published equality impact assessment at an early stage, with a genuine opportunity for that assessment to feed in to decision making.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION

In the face of the persistent under-representation of women in a changing world of local government, the Fawcett Society and the LGiU formed the Local Government Commission, kindly sponsored by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, to gather and publish evidence on female participation and representation across local government and identify the barriers to women's representation. Our terms of reference called for us to make recommendations on how to advance women's leadership in local government and establish a pipeline for power, including positive steps to support and inspire women to stand for elected office.

To steer our research and inform our recommendations, we brought together an expert group of commissioners from across local government, academia, and think tanks. The commission has been co-chaired by Dame Margaret Hodge MP and Gillian Keegan MP, Members of Parliament from both main parties who started their political careers in town halls.

The Commission has been in place for over a year. Our comprehensive programme of research and consultation has enabled us to understand where women are under-represented in local government; to quantify the barriers they face; to hear and share their voices and views on what needs to change; and to analyse the structures that hold them back.

Quantitative data

Following the establishment of the Northern Powerhouse, which saw 12 white men in a room signing the Greater Manchester devolution deal, we began our work with 'The Northern Powerhouse: an analysis of women's representation', published in 2016, which drew attention to the way that the new structures of devolution exclude women from the top table.¹

To understand the picture of women's representation, in the absence of official statistics, we commissioned the Centre for Women and Democracy to update the data which 'counts in' women councillors. The LGiU conducted a large-scale online survey of 2,304 councillors (12 percent of the total in England and Wales), in order for us to for the first time build up a picture of women councillors' experiences, the barriers they face, and the changes they want to see. The data from these two pieces of work comprised our interim report, published in April 2017.²

Qualitative data, consultation and analysis

Alongside this analysis, we have ensured that we have heard the voices of as many and as diverse a group of women with an interest in local government as possible. Our Commission has travelled across the country, holding evidence session events in Birmingham, Cardiff, London, and Manchester, which were attended by over 230 people, many of whom are councillors. We heard from expert panels with a wide range of experience, and discussion with an engaged and often angry audience has informed our work. Those contributing came from across party lines and across the officer/councillor divide.

Our open online consultation has received almost 500 responses, from a similarly diverse group of women, and some men. Their views are quoted throughout this report, anonymously in some cases at their request, and their responses to our questions about each part of the local government pipeline are summarised in the text.

We felt that women at the top of local government, and women who had not yet run for selection or election, might be less likely to respond to our calls for evidence, so we have consulted them directly. Anne Baldwin

1 Polly Trenow and Jemima Olchawski, (2016), *The Northern Powerhouse: an analysis of women's representation*, Fawcett Society <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/The-Northern-Powerhouse-Report-Fawcett.pdf>

2 Local Government Commission, (2017), *Does Local Government Work for Women? Interim report of the Local Government Commission*, Fawcett Society <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Does-Local-Government-Work-for-Women-Interim-Report-April-2017-1.pdf>

from the Women's Local Government Society, one of our commissioners, conducted in-depth interviews with twelve women council leaders and deputy leaders to give us further insight into the experiences of women in the top positions – and we have conducted telephone interviews with women who have considered running as a councillor but chosen not to thus far. We have commissioned Britain Thinks to carry out focus groups with ordinary women in London and Nuneaton about what local government means to them, and what they think of standing as a candidate.

Alongside these discussions, and led by the insight they have provided, we analysed some of the council processes and structures that impact on women. We submitted a Freedom of Information request to all local authorities in England about their maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave policies, analysed the dependent carers' allowance policies of a subset of councils, and reviewed the gender composition of council cabinets, combined authorities, and chief executive roles, following the 2017 elections.

The recommendations

This final report makes recommendations to multiple actors, reflecting the range of organisations and individuals who hold the power to make local government more gender equal. Those recommendations have been born out of discussion with commissioners and co-chairs, and tested widely with local government stakeholders. Ultimate ownership of them lies with our co-chairs, Fawcett, and the LGiU.

It is likely that a piece of work on this scale will not be repeated for some time. We urge the Government, the LGA, parties, councils and other stakeholders to heed the recommendations we make, and seize this opportunity for change.

ABOUT US

The Fawcett Society is the UK's leading charity campaigning for gender equality and women's rights at work, at home and in public life. Our vision is a society in which the choices you can make and the control you have over your life are no longer determined by your gender.

LGiU is a local government think tank and membership organisation. Our mission is simple: to strengthen local democracy, putting citizens in control of their own lives, communities and local services. We work with around 230 local councils and public services providers, along with a wider network of public, private and civil society organisations.

Our work encompasses a wide range of activities including: a regular policy briefing service; the annual Councillor Achievement Awards; providing the Secretariat for the Local Government APPG; learning and development seminars; a broad programme of policy events; peer challenge; research and consultancy.

We are grateful to the **Barrow Cadbury Trust** for funding the Commission. The Barrow Cadbury Trust is an independent charitable foundation committed to bringing about socially just change.

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We are grateful to Sam Smethers, Chief Executive, and Jemima Olchawski, Head of Policy & Insight, Fawcett Society, for their work in steering the Commission from the outset.

We are also grateful to all the women who spoke at our events, shared personal experiences and gave their time so generously. They have enabled this Commission to deliver a well-evidenced, impactful and considered piece of research.

THE COMMISSIONERS

We are grateful to our Women in Local Government commissioners for their continuing input and insight with this work:

Gillian Keegan, Member of Parliament for Chichester, and Chichester District councillor, Co-Chair of the Commission

Rt. Hon. Dame Margaret Hodge, Member of Parliament for Barking, Co-Chair of the Commission

Baroness Meral Hussein-Ece, Liberal Democrats

Cllr Angela Mason, London Borough of Camden

Binita Mehta-Parmar, former Councillor and Leader of the Conservative Group, Watford Borough Council

Heather Wakefield, Unison

Nan Sloane, Centre for Women and Democracy

Pam Cole, Women's Budget Group

Cllr Rita Patel, Operation Black Vote

Sarah Pickup, Local Government Association

Dr Shaminder Takhar, London South Bank University

Halla Gunnarsdóttir, Women's Equality Party

Deborah Cadman, Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council

Anne Baldwin, Women's Local Government Society

Simon Woolley, Operation Black Vote

Chris Naylor, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Cllr Judith Blake, Leader of Leeds City Council

Cllr Marie Pye, London Borough of Waltham Forest

Baroness Anita Gale, Labour Party

WHY DOES LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEED TO CHANGE?

Why local government?

Local government has a powerful impact on all our lives. Councils spend £94bn of taxpayers' money each year;³ they employ over 1.5 million people, 78% of whom are women.⁴ The services they provide determine the support we receive from our first years to our dying days; and women are more dependent on those services.

For decades local government has been a place where some of the greatest innovations in public policy have been born. Councils remain at the centre of many of the biggest problems that our nation faces, from the housing crisis to the social care crisis and meeting the needs of an ageing population.

Today, local authorities face significant challenges of their own. Budgets have been cut: local authorities lost 27 percent of their spending power between 2010/11 and 2015/16,⁵ and the Local Government Association (LGA) says the sector faces a £5.8 billion funding gap by 2020. Local authorities have done more with less, and made efficiencies, but many council leaders have warned that essential services are now at risk. Difficult decisions are being made in town halls as a result.

At the same time, the powers that local authorities exercise are changing. Many councils have lost significant control of local education policy through the academy schools programme, at the same time as gaining public health responsibilities. Universal Credit is gradually taking parts of the benefit system out of councils' hands, while they gained control over Council Tax Reduction schemes. The phasing-out of central government grant funding is taking council finances into uncharted new waters.

The structures of local government are changing. More councils are forming partnerships to deliver a range of services from social care to ICT. Most significantly, the creation of the new Combined Authorities and directly-elected metro mayors means that power is being taken away from both Whitehall and local councils and placed into new and untested governance structures, often negotiated away from the public eye.

Alongside these challenges and changes, local government election turnout remains low, rarely exceeding 40 percent outside of a general election year.⁶

With budgets being cut dramatically, the role of councils changing, and the creation of new combined authorities and directly-elected metro mayors, it is vital that women are represented around the decision making table.

Findings so far

What is striking is that the experiences of women councillors are very similar, regardless of the political party they represent.

3 Department for Communities and Local Government, (2016), *Local Authority Revenue Expenditure and Financing: 2016-17 Budget, England*

4 Local Government Association, <http://local.gov.uk/research-statistical-alert>, citing Office for National Statistics, *Quarterly Public Sector Employee Survey, Q3 2016*

5 Annette Hastings et. al., (2015), *The Cost of The Cuts: The impact on local government and poorer communities*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Spending power is the government's preferred measure, and other assessments of the reduction in funding suggest a higher amount.

6 Guardian Data Blog, (2012), 'UK election historic turnouts since 1918', accessed online at <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/nov/16/uk-election-turnouts-historic>

Northern Powerhouse

Published in June 2016, at the start of our Commission, this report found that the shift in powers to devolved authorities risked handing power to male-dominated structures and shutting women out of the decision making process. Although we saw some positive examples of equal representation within the Northern Powerhouse, men continued to dominate the top roles. We found that 40% of local councillors in the Northern Powerhouse region were women, but women made up just 21% of council leaders and directly elected mayors. 72% of senior leadership roles went to men. This report updates that picture.

Interim report

In May 2017 the Commission published our data-driven interim report, which laid out the scale of women's underrepresentation in local government, and presented data from a large-scale survey of local councillors to highlight the barriers that women councillors face.

We found that just one in three councillors in England is a woman, and this figure has scarcely changed over the last two decades. Even fewer women – 17 percent – progress to lead their councils. We found significant differences by party: 42 percent of Labour Party councillors elected in 2016 were women, up from 33 percent in 2008, while women's representation in the Conservative Party was almost flat at 30 percent, and the Liberal Democrats' representation appeared to be in reverse and is at 33 percent. Around 80 percent of councillors elected each year are incumbent, and we found that this significantly favours men. Of councillors in office for 20 years or more, there are three men for every one woman.

Our survey data confirmed that councils do not reflect the diversity of our society, and found that disabled and ethnic minority women experience multiple discrimination. We found that within the male-dominated environment of local government, misogyny is worryingly commonplace both in the council chamber and local parties, experienced as sexist comments and as gendered assumptions about women's capabilities. Women councillors experience barriers due to unpaid caring responsibilities and a lack of flexibility in how councils do business much more than their male counterparts. They are more excluded from informal networks, and are less confident that their voices will be heard.

Women councillors are no less ambitious to progress than men – but they feel pigeonholed on the basis of their gender, and held back by the way councils operate. We found an outdated culture which is holding local government back. It is ripe for change.

What's new in this report?

The Commission set ourselves the task of gathering evidence from a wide range of sources, and the stories and ideas we heard have contributed to the recommendations that this report makes. This report brings together the data we have already published, and new data analysis, with the voices of hundreds of women from across the country, in-depth interviews, the results of Freedom of Information requests, and further desk research.

It represents the culmination of a significant amount of research and discussion. We look across the pipeline of women's underrepresentation to uncover why local government is missing out on women's talents, why it fails to support them to progress, and what changes we think could shift the dial.

This report separates the pathway to the top out into getting more (and more diverse) women in, changing structural barriers, challenging sexism and changing council cultures, and women's experiences of leadership roles. It then looks at the experiences of women officers, and women in devolution. We recognise that these separations are of course artificial – the inflexible way that councils do business impacts on the interest other women have in becoming councillors; and improving women's representation at the top will, it is hoped, encourage more women to stand as councillors.

WHY DO WE NEED GENDER EQUALITY?

There is a strong and straightforward moral case for improving women's representation in local government; it is simply wrong that decisions that affect women are not proportionately made by them. But we believe that there are many other arguments to be made for ensuring that our councils are more diverse and equal.

Whilst we make the case for women's representation and for diversity we must also reflect on the fact that men never have to justify their over-representation. "Why do we need men in local government?" is a question never asked.

Diversity and performance

Research from across the private sector routinely demonstrates that more diverse teams, including teams with a more even share of women, perform more effectively than teams which are homogenous: from research and design teams in Spain, which are more innovative with women members,⁷ to senior management boards across the UK and North and South America, which are more likely to grow if they are gender-diverse.⁸

This is in part because teams which have a broader range of backgrounds and skills are less likely to fall prey to 'groupthink', and more likely to genuinely scrutinise the actions they take. But it also represents a greater ability to connect in to a wider range of consumers – or, in the local government context, to better understand the experiences of all of their residents.

Shaping the agenda

"It was always important to me to put so-called 'women's matters' like child care and health provision on the local radar as I feel women have a different experience and perspective on these matters and are usually more likely to have direct experience of the services on offer.... "

White British Conservative woman borough councillor, 55-64

We know that having women involved in the policy conversation, and in decision-making positions, makes a difference to whether issues which have a disproportionate impact on women are discussed. Work by Francesca Gaines and Vivien Lowndes has shown that where the new Police and Crime Commissioners are women, violence against women and girls is 1.7 times more likely to be identified as a policy priority.⁹ Their work also showed that attention being paid to the formal equalities duty also increased the likelihood of gendered violence being a policy priority.

Evidence from the Welsh Assembly suggests that within a context of greater gender equality (the Assembly was 47 percent women in 2007), female assembly members were responsible for raising some gendered issues the majority of the time that they were discussed – 62 percent of the time for childcare, 74 percent of the time for domestic violence, and 65 percent of the time for equal pay.¹⁰

7 Cristina Díaz-García, Angela González-Moreno & Francisco Jose Sáez-Martínez, (2013), 'Gender diversity within R&D teams: Its impact on radicalness of innovation' *Innovation: Organisation and Management*, Vol 15(2), pp. 149-160

8 Vivian Hunt, Dennis Layton, Sara Prince (2015), *Diversity Matters*, McKinsey & Company

9 Francesca Gaines and Vivien Lowndes, (2014) 'How is Institutional Formation Gendered, and Does it Make a Difference? A New Conceptual Framework and a Case Study of Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales', *Politics and Gender*, Vol. 10(4) pp. 524-548

10 Chaney, P., MacKay, F. and McAllister, L., (2007) 'Women, politics and constitutional change: the first years of the National Assembly for Wales', Cardiff: University of Wales Press (quoted in McMillan, J. & Fox, R. (2010) *Has devolution delivered for women?* [Hansard Society].

The changing role of a councillor

The work that local councillors do is changing. In their '21st Century Councillor' report, researchers at the University of Birmingham's INLOGOV describe the new and increasingly relational roles councillors have to play in the changing world of local government – such as brokering new relationships, helping residents make sense of changing public services, and working to enable citizens to do things for themselves.¹¹ There is a clear need for councillors to have the skills to open conversations with all parts of the community, and a more diverse body of councillors, along gender but also other identity lines, is vital to achieving that change.

CASE STUDY - THE IMPACT OF WOMEN COUNCILLORS

Cllr Marianne Overton, Lincolnshire County Council and North Kesteven District Councillor, and leader of the Independent group

I came into local government in 1991. One of our villages, Leadenham, has a road which winds through the village, with very little pavement. We had heavy pressure from continuous flow of lorries on their way cross country to Boston, which made the homes in the area unliveable. We couldn't get anything done about it, despite approaching our local councillor. We mothers refused to be brushed aside, stood up for ourselves, campaigned hard, researched the arguments well and spoke up at the Public Inquiry. Our Councillor was reluctant to support us. He also said that he was all we had, because no-one had stood against him at the last election. I stood against him, took the seat and we got the bypass.

I'm now a county and district councillor, and I see other women councillors making a huge difference too. For example, on our district council a woman councillor called Laura Conway, who was speaking against the general flow of debate, was concerned about an element of our 2014/15 Council Tax Support Scheme. The scheme proposed to include an element of child maintenance, which is often not paid, in its calculations, despite Government policy to disregard it completely in other benefit calculations. She felt this was a retrograde step which would have a negative impact on child poverty, as did local residents she represented. Having researched the issue, consulting with both officers and fellow councillors, she made a case for amending the proposed scheme. The change was eventually passed for the following year's scheme with the strong support of the Council – only one councillor voted against it. Many women – who make up 95 percent of single parents – would have lost out had she not spoken up.

¹¹ Catherine Mangan et. al., *The 21st Century Councillor*, University of Birmingham, INLOGOV

COLLECTING THE DATA

To tackle the problem of gender inequality on councils, we need to be able to measure it. Our commission has done so. But this should not be the responsibility of the third sector – Government must ensure this data is collected. A change to the law is needed so that political parties and civil society can monitor progress and push for equality.

This report includes an update to the data on women's representation following the May 2017 elections. This data is not collected centrally, requiring resources to search through council websites with the prospect of error where images are not available (and where they are). Analysis of candidates would place a further considerable burden.

Intersectional analysis by other protected characteristics, such as ethnicity or disability has not been conducted as it is too subjective to be viable without the individual councillor providing it themselves. Our data on these identities comes from our work surveying councillors, which may suffer from the usual biases of survey work. This weakness applies also to the data collected by the Local Government Association through their census survey, the last of which was conducted in 2013. As the gap since their last census also shows, survey data is also less useful in terms of monitoring progress as it is not sufficiently regular.

There is a clear need for equalities data to be collected as part of the process of applying to be a candidate in local elections, rather than leaving the burden on civil society.

Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 makes provision for political parties to collect equalities data for their candidates, but not at local government level – and this provision has not yet been enacted by the Government at any level. In addition, this provision would not ensure that data was collected for the many independent candidates who are elected to local councils each year.

We propose therefore that councils should have responsibility for collecting this data. Equalities monitoring forms should be included with council candidate nomination papers. Data on the sex of candidates should be collated – we suggest by the Electoral Commission – and published with a party breakdown. A judgement on how to publish other characteristics without disclosing individuals' sensitive data needs to be determined through consultation with the public, councillors, and relevant civil society organisations.

Collect and report diversity monitoring data – enact & amend Section 106

Data on the make-up of local council candidates and councillors must be collected in a uniform format. This can be achieved by enacting Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010; amending it to include local government as a relevant election, and to place the responsibility to collect data on local councils rather than political parties. This data should be centrally collated and published by the Electoral Commission, and must include protected characteristics like age, ethnicity, and disability.

GETTING MORE WOMEN IN

Progress on women’s representation has stalled. Just 33 percent of councillors in England, and 28 percent of councillors in Wales, are women.

At the current rate of progress in English county councils it will take 48 years for us to reach equality. In Wales it will take 82 years. We cannot wait that long.

Incumbency in local councils disproportionately benefits men. Men outnumber women almost three to one amongst councillors who have been elected for over 20 years.

The fear and reality of abuse and harassment, including on social media, deters women from standing.

The May 2017 local elections

Our interim report showed that women are underrepresented on councils across the country. They comprised 33 percent of councillors in England before the election, up only 5 percentage points since 1997, and only 26 percent of councillors in Wales, up only 4 percentage points in 12 years.

The period since that report has seen another round of local government elections in England and Wales, with all 22 councils in Wales going to the polls for the first time since 2012, and 35 county councils, 7 unitary councils and one metropolitan borough council in England which last voted in 2013 electing whole councils. The overall picture, once again, is of very little change (see Appendix 1 for detail). Women still make up 33 percent of councillors in England – the increase at this election amounts to just a 0.1 percentage point increase over 4 years. The change in Wales is just one percentage point.

Table 1: Percentage of Councillors Elected Who Are Women, 2017 Local Government Elections in England and Wales

	English County		English Unitary		Wales	
	2013	2017	2013	2017	2012	2017
All	26.8	28.6	28.5	28.2	26.8	27.8
Labour	40.7	44.6	42.7	45.2	30.1	32.6
Liberal Democrat	28.8	30.7	30.9	33.0	32.4	30.6
Conservative	23.2	24.9	18.9	19.9	20.2	29.9
Plaid Cymru	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	25.8	24.5
Independent/Other	15.6	27.5	18.2	23.9	21.9	21.4

Across English county and unitary authorities women’s representation has increased slightly within each party, ranging from a 4 percentage point increase amongst Labour county councillors, to a 1 percentage point amongst Conservative unitary councillors. Because of lower women’s representation in the Conservative Party, a strong Conservative election performance has resulted in a very small increase in women councillors on county councils, and a slight decrease on unitary councils. A positive development is the large increase in women’s representation amongst independent county councillors, from a low base of 16 percent.

In addition, Doncaster Metropolitan Council, which switched from electing by thirds to a whole council system, lost 5 women councillors resulting in a fall from 40 percent women before the election to 31 percent afterwards.

The picture in Wales is similar. Plaid Cymru and the independent groups have fewer women councillors, so their strong electoral performances against Labour resulted in a 1 percentage point increase overall – although again, increases in women’s representation for most of the parties was minimal. The exception is the Conservative

Party in Wales, who significantly increased their proportion of women candidates by 9.7 percentage points, to 29.9 percent, although this was from a low base.

At the current rate of progress, of 1.8 percentage points per election, on county councils it would take 48 years for us to reach gender parity. On Welsh councils it would take 82 years – the best part of a century.

Structural change

Setting Targets

Even where change has not stagnated in local government, it is far too slow. It is clear that structural change is needed in order to shift the dial on women's representation.

The three major parties – the Conservatives, Labour, and the Liberal Democrats – hold 91 percent of all council seats in England, and 58 percent of those in Wales, where Plaid Cymru make up 16 percent and independents make up a further 25 percent.¹²

Of the major political parties, only the Labour Party currently uses a quota system to ensure that more women become councillors.

The Labour Party's quota system at council level is aimed at fulfilling a target of 50% women. The rules are that:

1. The party's Regional Director, or General Secretary in Scotland and Wales, agrees a list of winnable wards locally.
 2. In councils that elect all seats at once, where a ward is deemed winnable and has two or three seats, one candidate must be a woman.
 3. In councils where a third or half of seats are up at each election, and a sitting councillor is retiring, at least one of either the sitting councillors or the candidate must be a woman, and any positive proportion of women must be maintained.
 5. In addition, the party selects further winnable seats at a local level where all-woman shortlists (AWS) are used.¹³
-

This system has had the intended impact in terms of representation. While the party still does not field an equal proportion of women candidates – in 2016 37 percent of its candidates were women – it is successful in placing them in winnable seats. The result is that a total of 44 percent of its councillors elected in England in 2017 were women, with increases on the last time these councils were elected. It is drawing close to equal representation. This is not the case, however, in Wales, where rules are clearly inconsistently applied. Five Welsh councils with any significant¹⁴ Labour representation have less than a quarter women, and five have over 45 percent.

Other parties have not introduced quota systems for council candidates. The Liberal Democrats have instituted all-women shortlists in retirement parliamentary seats for the 2017 general election,¹⁵ but this did not extend to local government. Our interim report found that women's representation in Liberal Democrat council groups was falling over time, and the May 2017 election saw only a slight improvement in England and a fall in Wales, compared to the last time those elections were contested.

The Conservative Party has not introduced a quota system at any level of candidate selection, although its 'A-List' of candidates for the 2010 parliamentary elections was over 50 percent women. Despite proactive work within the party to improve women's representation in parliament, including selecting women in the majority

¹² Data from <http://opencouncildata.co.uk/>, accessed 26th May 2017

¹³ Labour Party, *Rule Book 2017*

¹⁴ Defined as ten councillors or more

¹⁵ Liberal Democrats, *Agenda and Directory, Spring Conference York 11th – 13th March 2016*, Motion F20, p. 55

of retirement seats and a number of winnable seats, the party's 2017 local election results continue a trend of stagnation in women's representation on councils, with the positive exception of Wales.

Concerns are sometimes cited around the quality of candidates selected through a quota system. Academic research into Labour's parliamentary all-women shortlists, however, finds that candidates selected through them do not suffer at the ballot box, are equally as qualified as their political colleagues, and are equally successful in terms of frontbench promotion; and further research has also found that they are in fact more active in Parliament.¹⁶ The impact of quotas in local government may differ from Parliament, of course, with less competition for candidacy and somewhat less public scrutiny involved. A related but different concern raised about quotas is that they may impact on the perception of the quality of candidates, even if there is no impact in reality, resulting in women elected through them being hampered in their future progression.

"I support AWS wholeheartedly and think they are the way to 50:50 representation... I stood in a safe Labour seat and took part in an open selection and was still accused by opponents, during selection, of taking advantage of all women shortlist. This is despite the fact I was the only woman standing for selection. To this day when people recount the story of my selection it is with the presumption that it was an AWS."

White British Labour woman city councillor, 25-34

"This rule [one in three seats must be held by a woman] ... may have a detrimental effect... I worry that it leads to those selecting candidates to think that they should choose one woman, and then they can tick that box...It diminishes from the fact that the women have the same right as the men to be there, and could actually mean that women have to prove themselves even more than men to gain more than one selection place."

Rebecca Lury, Southwark Labour councillor

The commission recognises the evidence that quotas, if implemented properly, are effective at increasing women's political representation. Professor Sarah Childs' 'Good Parliament' report concluded that 'sex/gender quotas (when well designed) deliver increased numbers of women into legislatures', and that implementing quotas can have a 'positive impact on the supply pool of women'.¹⁷ The Fawcett Society remains committed to the use of time-limited quotas to increase women's representation, particularly where, as in this case, progress has stalled.

Given the firmly-held opposition to them in the Conservative Party, the Commission could not unanimously recommend that they are imminently made legally mandatory.¹⁸ Instead, we call for political parties to publicly set successively ambitious targets for each round of local elections, and outline a clear set of actions to achieve them, in order to bring them towards gender equality in local government by the time of the next general election.¹⁹

If by that time significant progress to increasing women's representation has not been made by each party, we believe that an overwhelming case will exist for the time-limited use of a legal requirement for 45 percent of local government candidates for each party to be women.

We call on political parties to commit now to early legislation after the next general election if progress is not made, with a view to implementing this requirement within the following 2 years. This position adapts to local government and the current political cycle the cross-party Women and Equalities Select Committee's recent

16 Peter Allen, David Cutts, and Rosie Campbell, (2014), 'Measuring the quality of politicians elected by gender quotas – are they any different?' *Political Studies* June 2014; Mary Nugent and Mona Lena Krook, (2016) 'All-Women Shortlists: Myths and Realities', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 69 (1): 115-135

17 Sarah Childs, (2016), *The Good Parliament*, University of Bristol

18 Time-limited mandatory candidate quotas are, however, a long-standing Fawcett Society policy ask.

19 Assuming a normal 5-year cycle.

recommendation on parliamentary representation.²⁰ In line with that proposal, this requirement would apply to parties with more than a certain number of candidates, and a range of possible financial sanctions should be considered.

Set targets, make progress, or legislate

Each political party must outline realistic but ambitious targets for increasing women's representation at each year's round of local elections, with a clear action plan for achieving those targets.

If each political party has not made significant progress against this plan to increase women's representation in local government by the next general election, they must commit to early legislation to implement a time-limited requirement for at least 45 percent of local government candidates to be women.

Term limits

The Commission's interim report showed that the slow pace of change is significantly driven by incumbency. Men were 1.6 times more likely to be long-term incumbent than women at the 2016 election. Our survey data showed that the under-representation of women amongst councillors increases the further into their tenure they are, with men outnumbering women almost three to one amongst councillors who have been elected for over 20 years.

Term limits on councillors could be a way to speed up the pace of change. 32 percent of women councillors in our survey supported the option of a limit as likely to make it easier to progress to leadership roles, with a quarter of women in each of the major parties selecting it.

"I do think that roles seem to be allocated based on length of service rather than knowledge and understanding. This means the positions tend to reflect the previous disproportionate number of males on the council."

White British Conservative woman district councillor, 45-54

We recognise that this proposal is likely to be controversial, and not all of our commissioners favoured it. It is true that parties sometimes struggle to find candidates for wards, particularly in some shire district councils and in Wales – but we would argue that the full set of recommendations in this report aims to make being a councillor accessible and attractive to a wider pool of individuals, and that this should spur parties to do more to reach out to the community. Term limits could lead to councillors having a limited period in senior roles if they have previously been the political opposition for a number of terms – but all parties would equally need to work harder for faster political change to avoid this happening.

We recognize that current councillors made the decision to stand on the basis of a set of rules which did not include term limits, and that they will have made sacrifices with the expectation that they can continue to stand. So we propose that term limits should be introduced with a significant lead-in time of at least two terms, or eight years. Our suggestion is a four term limit, on the basis that this would enable sufficient time for progression. For example, it would allow one term to get to grips with the role, another to begin to progress, and then two terms in a leadership position. The limit should be applied on the basis of the relationship between an individual and a specific council – so a person could not just move between wards on the same council, but could move from a shire district to a shire county, or between local authority areas.

Inasmuch as this proposal would discriminate on the basis of age, we view it as a proportionate means of achieving the aim of diversifying councils. A person becoming a councillor at the age of 50 would have as long a potential duration in office as a person become a councillor at the age of 18, and an equal opportunity to progress to the top.

²⁰ Women and Equalities Committee, (2017), *Women in the House of Commons after the 2020 election: Fifth Report of Session 2016–17*, House of Commons: London

This policy would require legislative change in the form of an amendment to the Local Government Act 1972. If legislated now, we propose that this rule change would begin to come into effect in 2025. It would ensure that in the future councils see greater turnover, and enable more women to come in, whilst not undermining the expectations of councillors who are already in their roles. Many electoral systems which include a term limit permit previous office holders to return after a term out of office, and we believe that would be fair in this case.

Term limits for councillors

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government should introduce a term limit for councillors to promote turnover and tackle the problem that more men tend to remain councillors for longer, limiting the opportunities for women to stand. We recommend a limit of four terms, or sixteen years. This should be introduced with a lead-in time of two terms, or eight years, to give existing councillors time to achieve their aims. The first councillors to stand down as a result would be in 2025.

Ask her to stand

Structural changes alone will not achieve the improvement in women's representation that we need to see. In order to ensure that change is sustained, a target or quota system needs to be supported by a culture that identifies local women who could stand, and supports them to progress to candidacy.

What do women residents think about local government?

To gain additional insight into the pipeline into local government, we commissioned Britain Thinks to conduct small-scale qualitative research in the form of two focus groups with members of the public, each spending an hour discussing local government. To ensure a variety of perspectives, the first group comprised women aged 18-30, who were mainly BAME 'remain' voters, living in London; and the second group comprised women aged 40-55, who were White British 'leave' voters living in Nuneaton.

Participants in these groups had low awareness of the role of local government, which was often limited to specific services which they had noticed a decline in, such as waste collection, street lighting, social housing and childcare. Often they were unclear which services councils provided as opposed to central government, or the Mayor of London, and they struggled to articulate the impact that councils have on the things that are most important to them.

It followed therefore that they often did not know what councillors do – and no-one in the groups could name their local councillors, although they were aware that councillors run advice 'clinics', and viewed these positively.

The women in these groups tended to perceive the average councillor as 'a white, middle class man'. While some participants had negative perceptions of the reasons for people becoming councillors, perceiving them as 'manipulative' or wanting a 'power role', there was also a significant sense that councillors have good intentions and wish to make things better for their local community.

"I don't think they set out to have bad intentions. They are people that have ideas of how they would make things better. They are probably people from the local community that think they can better the area."

'Remain' voter, 18-30, London

We asked if the women in our groups would consider running to be a councillor themselves – none would. They overwhelmingly thought of local councils as male environments, and could not see themselves, or other women, wanting to be part of them. They cited the likely obstacles that they might experience as being similar to those which get in the way of women in other roles of responsibility – in particular, fitting those roles around their families.

Revealingly, a number of women perceived that as a local councillor it might be very hard to make a real difference or change to your local area – and therefore not worth the time or challenge involved in running for election. The survey data in our interim report shows that this perception may not reflect the reality – 40 percent of women councillors feel they have more influence to change things than they expected before becoming a councillor, which was a similar proportion to men. There is clearly a positive message about the impact women can have as councillors that needs to be more widely shared.

What is the pipeline in to local government?

Our interim report identified that women are more likely to become councillors from a background of work with community organisations, with half of women councillors compared with 39 percent of men coming through that route. A consistent view from women responding to our consultation was represented by one woman councillor’s comment that “Women stand for election because they believe they can make a difference to their community, not necessarily because of political ideology”. In our survey, women were slightly more likely than men to say they became a councillor because they were asked to stand, or because they were inspired to by someone, but not significantly so. However, they were significantly more likely to say they became a councillor to improve the gender balance (16 percent compared to only one percent of men).

Party involvement

A key element of the pipeline to local government is party membership. The data in Table 2 suggests that women and men are fairly equally likely to support the main political parties – but they have not been equally likely to join. New 2016 data on the Labour Party suggests that they may now be at 45 percent women members following the influx of new members after the 2015 general election.²¹

Table 2: Party Supporters and Members in the UK

	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	UKIP	Green	SNP	Total
% women party supporters, 2004-2013 ²²	51	51	53	43	54	N/A	50
% women party members, 2015 ²³	29	38	32	24	43	44	35

Our research found that many of the barriers women councillors experience in the council chamber are also a problem they saw within political parties, ranging from sexist comments and assumptions, to practical barriers around meeting times and access to childcare.

When we come to address these issues within the council chamber setting later in this report, we will advocate a number of structural changes to enable women to participate on equal terms. Given the less formal (and less well resourced) nature of party political involvement, proposals on the same scale at a party level would not be feasible. However, political parties cannot simply ignore this issue. They should review how they conduct their activity, with a focus on meeting times and whether their approach supports people with caring responsibilities including at selection.

21 Tim Bale, (2016) ‘Revolt of Peasants?’ Labour’s changing membership: who they are and what they want’, presentation at the Social Market Foundation, 6 September 2016

22 Data from Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin, (2014), *Revolt on the Right*, Routledge: London. Supporters are people expressing ‘fairly strong’ or ‘very strong’ support for a party, from a 124,000 n sample.

23 Data from Tim Bale, Monica Poletti, and Paul Webb, (2016) ‘Candidate Selection: A View from the Grassroots’, Representative Audit of Britain Workshop, Birkbeck University of London. New data from the project solely surveying Labour members suggests that the gender balance had shifted to 52 percent female by 2016.

Political parties to issue guidance on sex discrimination

Political parties should issue guidance to local parties on the actions they should take to make their activities accessible to people with caring responsibilities, who are still more likely to be women; and the guidance should ensure there is no sex discrimination in the selection of candidates.

Political parties must also do more to actively encourage more women to become involved locally, or to view joining a political party with an eye to becoming a councillor as a viable prospect.

There is existing work in this area, and examples of best practice. We heard of a number of examples of local-level activity, from the Lancaster Green Party's 'Wine, Women and Politics' evenings to Camden's Women's Forum, which hosts current affairs debates to involve more women in political discussion. The Local Government Association (LGA) 'Be A Councillor' campaign raises awareness of the work of local councillors across the board through online tutorials, literature and promotion materials, by providing information.²⁴ The Parliament Project hosts events to share information about candidature at the Westminster level.²⁵

"Women often don't realise they have the skills to be a councillor, even though they are highly qualified. Good practice by Bristol Women's Voice including running a workshop on how to become a councillor countered this by showing women the skills they already had which could be very valuable to the community."

Eleanor Vowles, Bristol Green Party selection candidate

"Using too many high-profile women who go on to be council leaders, MPs etc is not necessarily helpful, as it can generate a feeling of "Well, I'm not as good as her...". Having women closer to their level (candidates & non-cabinet-level councillors) talk frankly about their experiences and how they overcame any problems seems to generate a more positive result in many cases."

Zoe O'Connell, Liberal Democrat Cambridge City Council cabinet member

A consistent theme from our consultation, and the in-depth interviews that we held with women who have not yet made the decision to run as councillors, is that there is an information gap. Women described not knowing how to find out about the process for running as a councillor, both within the party system and outside it. They also described a lack of information on the time commitment required. Work is being done in this area, from the recent Fabian Women's Network publication 'Stand up and Be Counted', which provides detailed advice to women who are interested in councillorship, to the work done by the Conservative Women's Organisation and Women 2 Win.²⁶

All political parties, and individual local councils, need to do more and build on these approaches. Without a pipeline of women who are interested in standing, the ambitious targets that we are calling for parties to set will not be achievable. The whole of local government needs to go out into the community to actively target women who may be interested in standing and to support them to get involved.

As well as the role that parties and councils need to play, in the year of the centenary of women's votes it is vital that the LGA provides more resources to fund cross-party activity to inform and engage women in local politics. Our research suggests that a model which sees local women councillors, (who are more likely to be relatable role models) speaking and debate on local issues, and a concerted effort made to target women in local community groups. This specific kind of activity was advocated by many women responding to our consultation.

Our commission has identified that there is support amongst women for standing to correct the gender balance; that community organization is a common route in; that some women report a lack of information on the role; and that party membership is disproportionately male. To shift this picture, we propose that localised activity to bring more women in to party and local politics is expanded.

²⁴ <https://beacouncillor.co.uk/>

²⁵ <http://www.parliamentproject.co.uk/>

²⁶ Abena Oppong-Asare, Abigail Wood, and Sara Hyde, (2016), *Stand Up And Be Counted: Be a councillor*, Fabian Women's Network; <https://www.women2win.com/>

LGA ‘Be a councillor’ to focus on women’s representation in suffrage centenary year 2018

The Local Government Association (LGA) should focus ‘Be A Councillor’ activity in the 2018 centenary year of women’s votes on women’s representation. The LGA should put significant additional resources into a proactive campaign to deliver cross-party, local events to encourage more women to consider political engagement and standing to be a councillor.

Public Scrutiny, Harassment, and Risk

“I think for many women, being held up to public scrutiny whilst also caring for children/ageing parents is a deterrent when considering standing.”

Woman who has stood for selection, 55-64 years old, Labour

All people who run for elected office face scrutiny from their electorate and the media, and the demands of a higher public profile. For many women who do so, however, that scrutiny is compounded by misogyny, and comes with an additional and founded fear of violence. Our survey data found that when standing as a councillor, there is a gender difference between councillors identifying ‘fear of violence’ (13 percent of women; 8 percent of men), or ‘harassment or abuse from the electorate’ (46 percent of women; 35 percent of men) as barriers to engagement.

This finding was echoed throughout our evidence session and consultation sessions. A number of women pointed to constant abuse on social media as a key factor in preventing women from running for selection or election – especially when threats were directed at family members. At our evidence session in Wales a key concern raised was around the lack of support that women candidates in particular receive, as the abuse often begins when they first run for office

Examples of prominent women in public life who had been attacked on social media also led to concerns amongst some women about the impact of raising your head above the parapet. Women who responded to our consultation, and who we spoke to in in-depth interviews, also spoke of the impact that the murder of Jo Cox had on their fears. Unsurprisingly, women do not distinguish between national and local government in this respect.

Tackling the culture of impunity for misogynists across social media and the responsibilities of the online platforms is a huge task which Fawcett and the Reclaim the Internet Campaign continue to work on alongside many other organisations. But there are things that local government can do.

The law at present makes it illegal to send a social media message to another person which is indecent or grossly offensive, or conveys a threat or false information, with the purpose of causing distress or anxiety. In 2015 over 1,800 people were convicted of these offences, and a further 1,125 were cautioned. Of these, 220 were given prison sentences.²⁷ There are criminal procedures in place, but many women councillors and candidates may not know about them – and the degree to which local police respond effectively may vary.

We call on councils to work alongside local police forces to set up information sessions for women candidates prior to election periods, so that they can be made aware of their legal rights to protection and to ensure that both they and the police are clear when interactions on social media cross the line into illegal abuse and harassment.

Local authorities to work with police to tackle abuse of council candidates

Local authorities should work with local police forces to ensure that women council candidates understand the legal protection available against online and offline abuse and harassment, and that they can quickly report it in the knowledge that they will be taken seriously.

²⁷ Ministry of Justice, (2016) ‘Criminal Justice System statistics quarterly: December 2016’, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-december-2016>

IMPROVING DIVERSITY

BAME women, disabled women, and younger women are underrepresented on councils, and experience significant additional intersectional discrimination.

Women from BAME backgrounds experience racist comments from other councillors, and additional exclusion from the 'old boys networks' that close out all women.

Muslim women councillors in particular described pressure not to engage with politics from men within their community.

Disabled women councillors face additional barriers to fulfilling their role.

The women that are elected to councils, as a whole, are not representative of the England and Wales adult population. Our survey data found that Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women are underrepresented, making up only 5.5 percent of women councillors when BAME people are 14 percent of the population. Disabled women make up 19 percent of the councillor population, which is lower than expected given the age profile of councillors.

Women councillors are an older population compared with the age distribution across England and Wales, and we cover the changes needed to make council business more family-friendly later in this report. It is hard to identify whether LGBT+ women are underrepresented, as measuring those identities in the wider population is difficult – but many of the LGBT+ women councillors responding to our survey did identify multiple discrimination.

Our survey data found that disabled women experience significant multiple discrimination, with 55 percent saying they experienced other discrimination beyond gender discrimination, compared with a little over a quarter of men. Half of our BAME women respondents also experienced multiple discrimination.

Disabled women councillors

“Disabled women have a really rough time. Getting involved in politics is doubly difficult because of things like inaccessible meeting rooms but it’s more than that because being taken seriously as a woman can be difficult, being taken seriously as a disabled woman (on anything apart from welfare benefits) is extremely rare. Then people wonder how could you be a councillor when you can’t campaign (i.e. you can’t knock on doors). Then they wonder: how can you be a councillor when you can’t get into all the rooms in the town hall. How can you be a councillor when you can’t go to all those community events in halls which are upstairs? How can you be a councillor when you can’t go and visit the local primary school in its Victorian building? How can you be a councillor when you can’t get into the pub after the meetings...?”

White British Labour Councillor, 55-64

The experiences of the disabled women who contributed to our evidence sessions and our consultation tell the story behind this underrepresentation and these intersectional barriers. Women with different types of disabilities experienced different types of discrimination: for a number of women with chronic or fluctuating conditions such as Crohn’s disease or ME the inflexibility of meeting times was an issue, whereas for councillors with mobility impairments inaccessible buildings were a barrier.

Beyond the practical barriers, many disabled women told us that the perception of what makes a ‘good councillor’ is one that discriminates against disabled women. Within the council chamber this can mean straightforward discrimination, with disabled women being taken less seriously and receiving additional abusive language due to their disability. Within political parties, a number of Labour women councillors described how selection or informal assessments of councillors’ worth were based on specific campaigning methods, such as door-knocking or street surgeries, which are less accessible to disabled people.

During our commission evidence sessions, we heard from a disabled woman councillor that the provision of policies outlining how councils will make ‘reasonable adjustments’ for disabled councillors, which are a requirement under the Equality Act 2010, is limited. We heard that most councils have a policy in place for staff and customers, but that this does not apply to councillors, for whom a different test for ‘reasonableness’ might apply. We heard that in the absence of policies in many councils, access to the adjustments disabled women require can depend on the power held by a councillor’s party, representing an unacceptably precarious situation for disabled people.

“I had thought about becoming a councillor for some time, but receiving an email from Labour about a mentoring scheme for people with disabilities to become involved with local government was the catalyst. Unfortunately the scheme did not deliver much support (I think the funding was removed) but by that point I had raised my head above the parapet locally... My motivation to stand was bound up with wanting to make a contribution knowing that my disability has become a barrier to returning to paid work, and my longstanding interest in education and social justice issues.... I was very worried about the doorknocking and street surgeries and have overcompensated massively by the share of the admin that I have taken on...”

Rebecca Knowles, Warrington Labour councillor

At our evidence session in Wales, we heard from Natasha Hirst, Policy and Programmes Manager for Disability Wales and former parliamentary selection candidate within the Labour Party. She described how all of the stages through to election are inaccessible, from party branch meetings to policy events to conferences. A key issue is that there is no funding available to support disabled people, including particularly those with communication needs. Whilst local parties need to think this through, there is also an onus for more financial support to enable people to participate.

In 2012 the coalition government introduced the Access to Elected Office (AEO) Fund, on a pilot basis, offering grants of between £250 and £40,000 to disabled people to help with additional costs they may face in running for election.²⁸ This was viewed as a positive step by disabled people’s organisations, but after the 2015 election the scheme was allowed to lapse and a decision on its future remains pending.²⁹

Given the higher prevalence of multiple discrimination that they experience, it is likely that a failure to support disabled people to become councillors impacts on disabled women disproportionately. To tackle this issue, we propose that all councils introduce reasonable adjustments policies for disabled councillors. We also propose that the government should re-open the Access to Elected Office Fund.

BAME women councillors

Women from a range of BAME backgrounds, and different cultural and religious backgrounds, gave evidence to our commission sessions, spoke from the floor, and responded to our consultation. They described a range of experiences, some of which were common across different identity groups and some which differed.

Many of the BAME women who responded to our consultation described experiencing racist attitudes and comments. A common theme was around an intensifying of the ‘old boys’ network’ effect for women from BAME backgrounds, deepening a disadvantage which, our survey data finds, is felt by all women. This exclusion was described by one Black woman councillor as linked directly to her actions in speaking up for her community, which led to her being labelled a ‘troublemaker’ by other councillors.

“I stood because I didn’t see anyone like me (a young Black African woman) on the Council. Standing was extremely difficult ... there was no process manual on what to expect next – communication on the whole process needs to be improved significantly. There needs to be training and information sessions lead by diverse people to encourage more diverse people to stand.”

Black African Labour woman councillor, 25-34

28 <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-elected-office-fund/overview>

29 John Pring (25 May, 2017), ‘Election 2017: Elected office access fund closure was ‘undemocratic tragedy’, *Disability News Service*, <http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/election-2017-elected-office-access-fund-closure-was-undemocratic-tragedy/>

“Consideration of Black and minority candidates is still done as a conscious decision as a means of local appeasement, e.g. where there is a ward with a significant South Asian community, a South Asian will be selected to stand. That being said, there are very few local authorities which reflect the ethnic make-up of the communities they serve... the common consensus is that as long as there is an element of minority representation, everything is alright.”

African European Labour disabled woman councillor, 35-44

Shaista Gohir, Chair of the Muslim Women’s Network, described a set of experiences to our evidence session which were common amongst Muslim women who were trying to stand as Labour Party councillors. They experienced a pattern of slander and rumours aimed at pressuring them to stand down. These were started by men within their communities who were often connected to the local political party. However, the response from party was limited.

“I think some Muslim women face extreme barriers to getting selected in certain parts of the country. Many local Labour parties in big cities and towns have been taken over by Pakistani-male ‘biradari’ style politics which blocks people from being selected who may have different views, lifestyles or ways of doing things from what they approve of. Women are particularly at risk of this as the ‘acceptable’ standards that these men think that they should live by to be ‘decent’ or ‘good’ are so fixed and strict.”

South Asian Labour woman cabinet member,

Breaking down the intersectional barriers that BAME women councillors face requires a change in the attitudes of senior party figures within local government, who are often white men. We urge them not to be inactive bystanders when they see BAME women, in particular Muslim women, pressured not to stand from within their community. There is a need for local government leaders to recognise and talk about this problem, to actively work with BAME and Muslim women to reach and encourage others in their community to stand, and to visibly support them if they do.

Reasonable adjustment policies for disabled councillors

All local authorities should introduce reasonable adjustments policies for disabled councillors so that access to legal entitlements is not subject to discretion.

Access to elected office fund to be reopened

The Government should re-open the Access to Elected Office fund to ensure that disabled women councillors do not face avoidable barriers to being a candidate.

Parties to review how councillor performance is assessed

Political parties should review how councillor performance is assessed at the local level to ensure that disabled women are not disadvantaged by a reliance on inaccessible public engagement methods and working environments to come to a judgement.

Challenge racism and support BAME and Muslim women

Political parties need to take positive action measures to enable and encourage more BAME women councillors to be selected, and local government leaders need to support Muslim women who experience pressure from within their communities not to participate in political life.

The standards panel system and code of conduct outlined elsewhere in this report for combatting sexist behaviour must also be made to work for other protected characteristics, including ethnicity and disability.

Data collection must also allow us to understand the full diversity of women in local government.

REMOVING STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO PROGRESS

There is a complete lack of maternity leave provision. Only five councils (2 percent) say that they have a formal maternity policy in place for their ordinary councillors. 12 councils (4 percent) have a policy in place in relation to councillors who receive Special Responsibility Allowances.

Women councillors experience patchy provision for maternity, childcare, and flexibility on working times and are discouraged from claiming for childcare expenses.

Council meeting times and the inability to join meetings remotely exclude women with caring responsibilities.

One lead member was told she would have to give up her council role if she got pregnant.

The practical structures of male-dominated local government need to change to support women, who still carry out the majority of unpaid care work, to become councillors and to progress to senior positions.

Our interim report found significant differences in the proportion of women and men for whom childcare (28 percent compared with 18 percent), other caring commitments (47 percent compared with 16 percent), and a lack of maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave (33 percent of women aged 18 to 44 and 16 percent of men) are a barrier to fulfilling their role. The problem of long distances to meetings is also a barrier for half of women county councillors, perhaps linked to other time pressures from caring roles.

This section of the report looks at some of the changes that councils and central government need to make to help overcome these practical barriers. In many cases there is a real need to end the patchwork of support for councillors with caring responsibilities that exists across the country.

Maternity

“There is still insufficient assistance given to women with caring responsibilities – every Council should have a maternity policy, it should be off-limits to describe a Councillor taking a maternity break as “shirking” or “lazy” which still happens, I’m sad to say.”

Mixed ethnicity Labour woman councillor, 55-64

There is no uniform policy in place across England for councillors who need to take maternity, paternity, adoption or parental leave. Our interim report found that a ‘lack of maternity/paternity provisions or support’ is a real barrier for women aged 18 to 44, a third of whom (compared with 16 percent of men in the age group) say it holds them back in fulfilling their role as a councillor.

Our commission heard of the impact that this lack of support has on individual women, from Cllr Brigid Jones, the Birmingham City councillor who was told that she would have to step down from her role as cabinet member for children’s services if she became pregnant,³⁰ to the Newham Borough councillor who lost her seat and had to stand for re-election after the birth of her child.³¹

Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 states that if a councillor does not attend council for six months, they lose their position unless the authority has approved their absence. This means that if a woman who is a councillor took the twelve months of maternity leave that an employee would be entitled to, they could lose their position. The same applies to councillors receiving a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA), such as cabinet members or committee chairs, for whom that larger allowance is more likely to form a key part of their income.

30 BBC Online, (October 2016), ‘Birmingham City Council Schools chief ‘told to go if pregnant’, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-37587188>

31 Evening Standard (March 2015), ‘Councillor ‘dumped’ from authority over time off... after giving birth prematurely’ <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/councillor-dumped-from-authority-over-time-off-after-giving-birth-prematurely-10122410.html>

We submitted a Freedom of Information Act 2000 to all English local authorities to understand what arrangements, if any, they have in place (see Appendix 2 for the text of the request). Of 353 authorities contacted, 333 responded.

Our request revealed that only four councils – one percent of those responding – say that they have a formal maternity policy in place for their ordinary councillors.³² 12 councils – four percent – have a policy in place in relation to Special Responsibility Allowances, which are given to councillors who hold positions like a cabinet post or the chair of a committee.

Many of these formal policies are positive, stating that councillors will continue to receive their allowances, both basic and SRA, in full, and that a replacement would be appointed on a full SRA for the time of absence. A number refer to parity with council employees, and to ensuring that an absence of more than six months will be automatically approved.

However, some had unnecessary and unhelpful restrictions, including two with a maximum of three months' maternity leave for SRAs, and one which had SRAs only payable to a substitute cabinet member if the woman taking leave gives up her own allowance.

We also asked whether councils had informal arrangements in place to cover councillors with new caring responsibilities. 67 (20 percent) said they had such policies for ordinary councillors, and 64 (19 percent) said they did for councillors with Special Responsibility Allowances.

The quality of these alternative arrangements varies significantly. A little under half who said they had an informal policy said that the council could take a decision under the 1972 Act to extend the allowed period of absence for parental leave. 12 councils said that they would simply take things on a 'case by case' basis. Eight said that this was an issue for political groups within the council, not the council as a whole, while nine said that councillors would continue to receive their allowances whilst giving no further information. Two said that they would seek to enable councillors to attend with their children – which might be welcome alongside a workable leave policy, but in itself is not sufficient.

That leaves 254 councils which told us that they have neither a formal policy nor informal arrangements in place for councillors with a newborn or newly adopted child. Women in those authorities, and many with informal arrangements, are reliant on the discretion of the council if they want to take off the same time that normally employed women are legally guaranteed. For almost all women in cabinet or chair positions, there is no provision for them to be guaranteed to continue in their role, or to continue to receive what is likely to be their main income.

This data covers England only. In Wales, the National Assembly has passed regulations that implement a nationwide six month period of maternity leave,³³ and the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales has ruled that the equivalent to SRAs should be paid during a period of family absence. This is clearly an improvement on the English situation, but not in line with the maternity leave permitted to employed women.

We call for the government to amend section 85 of the 1972 Act so that taking time off for maternity, paternity, adoption or parental leave is not considered to be an absence. The government should make clear through guidance that SRAs should continue to be paid when a cabinet member or chair is on these types of leave, and that a substitute cabinet member or chair can be appointed who will also receive an allowance.

The government needs to consider whether additional funding can be made available so that this does not put councils out of pocket. As an estimate of the cost this might entail, if half of all councils in the country had their leader (the highest cost SRA) on maternity leave for the full 12 months, each year, the total cost in England

32 The London Boroughs of Camden, Hackney, Islington and Southwark.

33 The Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) Regulations 2013

would be £3.8m.³⁴ Because most SRAs are lower than this amount, this very likely represents a high upper bound of the cost. Policies for non-SRA councillors would not entail a direct cost as work would be picked up by other ward councillors and officers.

Introduce maternity, paternity and parental leave entitlements for councillors across England

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government should introduce a statutory England-wide, comprehensive maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave policy for councillors. This should be in line with leave available to employees, and ensure that cabinet members continue to receive their allowances.

Extend provision in Wales

The Welsh Government should extend Welsh local government's maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave policy to be in line with the leave available to employees

Childcare and Care for Adult Dependents

“Women with children almost always in my experience only stand for one term. It seems to be, in my council at least, almost impossible to maintain a council role and child care especially if you have another job as well. For one thing most people cannot afford to live on a councillor's allowance so it means working upwards of 60 hours a week. Additionally, I know councillors have been encouraged not to claim childcare allowance as set out in the councillor's allowance policy so as to reduce the appearance of our spending and that is ridiculous.”

White British Labour woman city councillor, 25-34

Childcare and care for adult dependents forms a barrier to engagement for many women councillors. While the inherent difficulties of arranging care for evening meetings is part of this problem, and addressed below, the degree to which councils cover the costs of paying for care is also a factor, as responses to our consultation demonstrated.

Regulations from 2003 make provision for all councils to offer an allowance to cover the caring costs that councillors incur when fulfilling their role.³⁵ However, a great deal of freedom is given to councils to decide what support they actually provide, subject to them taking note of the recommendations of an independent remuneration panel.

We reviewed the schemes in place across over a hundred local authorities, and found considerable variation. We identified two councils which do not provide for any carers' allowances at all – Bassetlaw and Doncaster. Pendle Borough Council pay only £3 per hour for care; Wyre Forest District Council pay only £4 per hour; and Rochdale Borough Council's scheme pays just £5.06 per hour, and specifically states that it is 'a contribution rather than full reimbursement of carers' expenses' – although this important caveat is notably not made for travel expenses.

Schemes have other restrictions that reduce the support they provide. Some will pay for care for only one dependent child or adult at any one time, leaving people with multiple caring responsibilities in the lurch. Some, such as Preston Council, will only cover formal Ofsted-registered childcare, which excludes the informal babysitting arrangements that many councillors will need to use for evening meetings. Some exclude councillors who receive any other allowance for care, such as Carers' Allowance. The range of council business that they cover also varies, from only covering formal meetings to some, like Portsmouth City Council, which cover 'ward work, advice centres and civic functions'.

³⁴ Based on an average council leaders' SRA of £21,756 in 2014-15, data taken from the Taxpayers' Alliance website, accessed 6th July 2017, http://www.taxpayersalliance.com/taxpayers_alliance_reveals_cost_of_councillors_allowances_hits_nearly_700_million

³⁵ The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003

Again, councillors with caring responsibilities, who are disproportionately likely to be women, are able to access a patchwork of different levels of support depending on where they are. We call for this to change. We outline the features of a comprehensive dependent carers' allowance below. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government should consider introducing this at a national level, through issuing guidance to local councils' independent remuneration panels.

Childcare and caring costs must be covered

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government should issue guidance to the existing local independent remuneration panels to promote our model for a comprehensive dependent carers' allowance scheme so that all childcare and adult dependent care costs are covered.

Key elements of a model dependent carers' allowance scheme

- Cover actual costs for Ofsted-registered care, and for professional home carers for adult dependents
- Pay for informal care, such as a babysitter, at a minimum of the applicable Real Living Wage
- Permit councillors to claim for care for multiple dependents for the same period of time
- Do not exclude councillors who receive Carers Allowance from claiming.
- Do not artificially limit the amount that councillors can claim over a period of time
- Cover all council related business, using regulation 7(h) of The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 which permits payments to cover 'the carrying out of any other duty approved by the authority, or any duty of a class so approved, for the purpose of, or in connection with, the discharge of the functions of the authority or any of its committees or sub-committees.'

"Many women are struggling with childcare and the meetings (often early evening) are difficult if you have young children. I have also found that most female colleagues do not claim the childcare allowance which is on offer for fear of it being used against them politically."

White British Conservative woman county councillor, 35-44

In addition to the issue of what care is covered and at what rate, women councillors raised the problem of dependent carers' allowances being reported alongside each individual councillor's other allowances. Many said that they do not claim it as a result, as they are concerned that having larger expenses will lead to criticism.

The issue of feeling able to claim childcare allowances has also been identified as a concern in research on Westminster. Professor Sarah Childs' 'Good Parliament' report recommends that MPs' childcare costs should be reported in aggregate form rather than for each individual MP, just as their disability and any additional security costs are, in order to promote their take-up.³⁶

We believe that an approach similar to this should be taken at local level. Due to concerns over ensuring transparency, we recommend that the data is still published on a member-by-member basis, but separately to the main allowances data. This would send a clear message to encourage take-up. This may require an amendment to regulation 15 of The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales has already given councils the option to do this in Wales.

Change childcare expenses reporting so that councillors can claim

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government should change the law so that councillors' childcare expenses are reported separately to the main Members' Allowances data, so that reporting of them does not deter women from claiming support.

³⁶ Sarah Childs, (2016), *The Good Parliament*, Ibid

CASE STUDY

Zöe Franklin, former Guildford Liberal Democrat Councillor

I was approached to run for council because of my local voluntary work. I was told that I would be able to claim back my childcare costs. However, I found out that this allowance only covered official council meetings, not other meetings that my council work required, or meetings with residents, or casework. Having raised this with the council they agreed to allow other meetings to be reimbursed, but only at the discretion of the Head of Democratic Services. In addition, the hourly rate permitted was significantly lower than local childcare costs. As a result I felt pressure to keep my claims as low as possible – it is clear that councils need to find a better way to tackle this.

As a working age woman and a mother I felt as though I was looked down on by some of the older, retired councillors – this was in contrast to my residents who welcomed the diversity I brought. It took 4 years of being a councillor before I was given any responsibility. For example, when I missed a group meeting where responsibilities were allocated because I was unwell and was caring for an unwell child, I wasn't given a role as it was assumed that I wouldn't have enough time; despite having indicated beforehand that I was interested in a particular role. I feel that too often assumptions are made about young mothers and that professionalising the role could help tackle some of those issues.

I stood down as a councillor in 2015, partly due to family and time issues, but primarily due to the financial barrier I faced. The income I received from my councillor allowance was not sufficient and if I took part-time work I wouldn't have enough time to do the role justice. Partly due to my outspokenness when standing down, Guildford Borough Council increased their Basic and Dependents' Carer's allowances significantly at the earliest opportunity.

Flexibility and Use of Information Technology

“Evening meetings are really difficult for everyone with caring responsibilities, not just parents. There isn't a straightforward solution as I recognise that some evening meetings should happen to enable residents to attend (but of course many of those will also have caring responsibilities too). It would help if there was a balance of different meeting times and a recognition of other responsibilities.”

White British Labour woman councillor and cabinet member, 35-44

Much of local government's business takes place in formal meetings. This represents an additional barrier for women with caring responsibilities, and for some disabled people – but it also represents an issue for people who are working full time. The focus on physical attendance at meetings is also out of step with the way that modern workplaces function – including the officer side of local government – where the use of information technology to enable remote attendance at meetings is fairly widespread.

Our interim report found that over half – 59 percent – of women councillors feel that greater flexibility in terms of meeting times would be likely to bring more women in, while 41 percent specifically support greater use of Skype or remote voting in order to enable flexibility. Half of women councillors on English county councils said that the distance to meetings was a barrier to their engagement – at our Wales event, we heard from Cllr Rosemarie Harris, the leader of Powys County Council, that in her 120 mile long authority, she was closer to six other town halls than her own. Widespread adoption of remote attendance would mean that the councillor role was feasible for a wider group of people as a second or additional role, rather than a main job.

Remote attendance and voting has been enabled through legislation in Wales, and according to the Welsh

Government it has been trialled but not used for formal meetings.³⁷ We propose that these regulations be emulated in English legislation as well, and that in both England and Wales they are amended so that the onus is placed on councils to provide technology and support so that all councillors are able to attend meetings remotely by default. The government has consulted on video conferencing for devolution's Combined Authorities and joint committees of councils, showing that it can be done, but that consultation did not include single local authorities.³⁸

Remote attendance at municipal meetings is in place across the world, from the USA to Sweden.³⁹ Online voting is even used in general elections in Estonia.⁴⁰ The technology is clearly in place and can be made secure, especially on the smaller scale of local authority meetings.

Given the evidence this report presents, we believe that ministers need to think again on this issue. Remote attendance would need to be done in a way that ensured that the public could still see and hear their representatives' contributions, but we are confident that this could be achieved.

Legalise remote attendance at council meetings and use technology to support inclusion

The Secretary of State should change the law so that remote attendance at meetings, including voting rights, is possible through Skype or other technological solutions. Councils should be required to proactively offer this to their councillors.

The Welsh Government should proactively encourage councils to offer remote attendance to their councillors

“Having a time limit on meetings and sticking to them is key... this really helps women with children (and with a life outside politics).”

Lorna Reith, Haringey Labour councillor

The commission also heard from a number of women councillors who felt that the tendency of formal local government meetings to start at difficult times, and to significantly overrun, was a barrier when combined with caring responsibilities. They identified that often there would be no guillotine motion in place on meetings. Women councillors also cited a number of different and specific meeting times that had been implemented at their councils with the aim of ensuring that council business was more family-friendly – these varied from ensuring meetings were between 10am and 3pm for parents who are on the school run, to starting meetings after 7.30pm so that parents of newborns could put them to bed before attending.

We believe that council members' services teams have a vital role to play in balancing different requirements. Rather than continuing past patterns of meeting times, or setting them in consultation with the Leader, they should regularly survey councillors to identify the most convenient times – and give additional precedence to the needs of councillors who are under-represented when setting the meeting calendar.

Consult on meeting times to better meet the needs of those with caring responsibilities or disabilities

Council members' services teams should regularly survey councillors to identify the most mutually convenient meeting times for all members involved in meetings, and when setting meeting times should make sure councillors with caring responsibilities and disabled councillors are not excluded.

37 Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011; discussions with the Welsh Government's 'Diversity in Democracy' team

38 Department for Communities and Local Government, (2016), Connecting Town Halls: Consultation on allowing joint committees and combined authorities to hold meetings by video conference, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/566746/Connecting_Town_Halls_consultation.pdf

39 Streamshed website, accessed 6th July 2017, 'Botkyrka Municipality puts meetings online', http://www.streamshed.com/reference_botkyrkacity.htm ; City of Kirkland, 'Memorandum, October 2015', http://www.kirklandwa.gov/Assets/City+Council/Council+Packets/102015/10b_UnfinishedBusiness.pdf ; multiple other US municipalities have employed remote attendance.

40 e-estonia website, <https://e-estonia.com/solutions/e-governance/i-voting/>

Volunteers?

“I am very proud of everything that I’ve achieved... However, my enjoyment of being a local councillor was marred by the constant stress and worry about the insecurity of having to rely on my SRA as my only source of income (for two years I worked as well, with virtually no support, and it nearly killed me with exhaustion). As a single woman with a mortgage I felt discriminated against, ignored by a system that assumes cabinet members are wealthy or can rely on the support of a partner in a well-paid, secure job.”

White British Labour woman councillor, 45-54

The view of central government has changed over the last two decades as to whether the role of local councillors is more like their Westminster counterparts, or is fundamentally a ‘volunteer’ role. For example, councillors were given access to the Local Government Pension Scheme in 2001, which was then rescinded in 2014 with the minister at the time stating that ‘civic duty cannot be bought’.⁴¹ This was estimated to save £7m at that time.

We do not advocate for councillors becoming paid employees, rather than receiving an allowance. However, bringing other elements of the support on offer to councillors into line with the usual expectations of professional roles would enable a more diverse group of people to consider standing for election. With councillors spending an increasing amount of time on their roles – up to 25 hours per week in 2013 compared with 22 hours in 2004-2010⁴² – and with their roles changing and expanding, this is an urgent necessity.

The financial considerations around being a councillor do not fall equally on men and women. Women councillors were slightly more likely in our survey data to say that councillor allowances being too low was a barrier for them (59 percent compared with 50 percent for men). We know from the Local Government Association’s census that women councillors are more likely to work part-time, which is typically lower-paid: and if they are employed, they are less likely to be in managerial or executive, or technical or professional roles.⁴³

When this picture is coupled with the well-documented pensions gap between women and men, a clear case is made that the removal of local government pensions, alongside other financial considerations facing councillors, is a gendered issue.⁴⁴ This was raised by a number of contributors to our evidence sessions, including a current council leader and a long-term cabinet member who both cited it as a barrier to women’s progression.

We advocate that government looks again at the support that is on offer to councillors across the board, including pensions, as part of the package required to diversify local government representation.

“Pensions matter much more to women – Brandon Lewis needs to understand that!”

Kay Twitchen, former Essex County Council Conservative Cabinet Member

41 Brandon Lewis, 19 December 2012, ‘Written Ministerial Statement: Local government pension scheme’, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/local-government-pension-scheme>

42 Kelly Kettlewell and Liz Phillips (2014), *Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013* (LGA Research Report). Slough: NFER

43 LGA, (2014), *National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013 – analyses by gender*, additional data tables

44 Polly Trenow et. al., (2016), *Closing the Pension Gap: Understanding Women’s Attitudes to Pension Saving*, London: Fawcett Society

CHALLENGING SEXISM AND CHANGING COUNCIL CULTURE

There is a harmful culture of sexism in some parts of local government politics which would not be out of place in the 1970s. Our evidence has clearly shown that decades of male over-representation has led to a culture where sexist language is tolerated, and viewed as part of political life.

38% of women experience sexism. 1 in 10, sexual harassment. There is no formal standards committee and no way to remove a councillor who, for example, sexually harasses a council colleague

Male councillors often promote a macho, combative culture in council chambers, silencing or appropriate women's voices.

Sexism and Harassment

There is a harmful culture in some parts of local government politics which urgently needs to be addressed. Decades of male over-representation has led to an environment where sexist language is tolerated, and viewed as part of the standard to-and-fro of political life. Comments from male councillors which would not be out of place in the 1970s are still heard in our town halls.

Throughout our commission we heard further stories which highlight the nature of the sexism women experience, and adding to the picture that Fawcett's previous work has found.⁴⁵

This can take the form of belittling women councillors with patronising assumptions about their abilities. Women councillors responding to our consultation described male councillors and party colleagues making objectifying and insulting comments about their bodies. A frequent feature of sexism in selection processes was the assumption that stereotypes about women and caring roles would make them unfit to be councillors.

CASE STUDY

A woman council candidate's experiences

"I joined a local political party a few years ago; it was unsurprisingly male dominated, but there were women involved at a committee and executive level, which gave me confidence that women were welcome and considered equal.

"However, when I applied and was selected as a candidate for local elections, it became clear that there was a culture of demeaning younger women and dismissing the contribution that women make. A women's group of the party was described as "the wives club", and an evening dinner with a senior national political speaker was promoted as an opportunity for "the wives" to dress up. When myself and a female colleague spoke up we were described as "aggressive," and she and I were referred to by demeaning, sexist nicknames.

"I have been told by my own party colleagues to "run away little girl and let the grown ups do their job" on social media. My emailed questions are ignored, I have been excluded from meeting notifications, and my contributions to discussions are tolerated rather than welcomed.

"This has not been unexpected, and only strengthens my determination to remain involved and challenge this culture."

(Some details have been changed to preserve anonymity)

45 Polly Trenow (2014), 'Sexism in Local Government – briefing paper', Fawcett Society

Our survey clearly showed that some councils have a real problem with sexist language – beginning with political parties, where 38 percent of women councillors told us it had been a barrier for them, and spreading into the town hall chamber where a third said they had experienced sexist comments from other councillors. For 10 percent of women in both environments, this had escalated to sexual harassment.

“At the moment I don’t want to stand [again]. I have faced sexism, ageism and racism. I have given speeches and asked questions and been laughed at, told to put up and shut up.”

Black African London Labour woman councillor, 25-43

“I was told my skin wasn’t thick enough to be a councillor... I have witnessed vitriolic personal attacks in meetings, fat-shaming of women councillors, and women being told that they have the IQ of a crisp packet.”

Former Liberal Democrat woman councillor, speaking at our evidence session

There have been a number of changes in the last decade to the way that standards for councillors’ behaviour is regulated, and these differ in England and Wales.

In England, following the Local Government Act 2000, a nationwide regulatory regime was put in place for conduct, maintained by Standards for England (formerly the Local Government Standards Board for England). The board enforced a mandatory code of conduct, and had the power to suspend councillors. This code included prohibitions on bullying, breaching the Equality Act 2006, and bringing the authority into disrepute.⁴⁶

But Standards for England and the mandatory code of conduct were abolished by the Localism Act 2011. In their place, local authorities are required to promote and maintain high standards of conduct, and introduce their own local codes and sanctions, with no formal model provided. The only requirement is that they include the ‘Nolan principles’ of public life.

The example text provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government makes no reference to non-discrimination, or the Equality Act 2010 – the only reference to conduct is a requirement to “promote and support high standards of conduct when serving in your public post.”⁴⁷

This means that there is a patchwork of different approaches to sexist or otherwise discriminatory behaviour by councillors, and no guarantee that a code of conduct will make any reference to sex discrimination, or other kinds of discrimination. Local standards committees, if councils choose to have them, do not have the power to suspend councillors. In addition, there is no higher authority for a person complaining about a councillor to appeal to.⁴⁸

This needs to change. Codes of conduct need to make clear that councillors’ behaviour is governed by the Equality Act 2010’s prohibition on discrimination, and that in addition to the law sexist and bullying behaviour will not be tolerated. Women councillors, and officers, need to feel secure that there is both a formal route for them to go down locally to challenge discriminatory behaviour, and that if that route fails they can appeal to a higher arbiter.

In the former case, we propose local standards committees, elected from amongst councillors and politically balanced, in the hope that this ensures some degree of fairness. The LGA and DCLG would be best placed to identify the most effective body to handle higher appeals.

46 Mark Sandford, (2016) ‘House of Commons Briefing Paper Number 05707: Local government standards in England’, House of Commons Library

47 Department for Communities and Local Government, (2012), ‘Illustrative text for local code of conduct’, accessed online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/illustrative-text-for-local-code-of-conduct--2>

48 Mark Sandford, (2016), Ibid.

“The culture of the group and of the council generally is very unwelcoming to women... People literally shout and scream at each other across the room. Our opposition are particularly unpleasant to our female members- something accusing them of being controlled by this man or that man, patronising questions being asked... I’ve sat in group meetings and watched my opinion ignored only to see men make the same point and get a response.”

White British London Labour woman councillor, 25-34

Standards committees to suspend then deselect councillors who sexually harass council colleagues, staff or the public

It should not be possible for a councillor to continue to represent a political party, nor to hold elected office if they are found to have sexually harassed someone. If a councillor is accused of sexual harassment they should be suspended pending investigation by the Standards Committee, then deselected if the allegations are upheld.

Codes of conduct to address sexism and discrimination

Local authorities should make clear in their codes of conduct that councillor behaviour is governed by the prohibition on sex discrimination in the Equality Act 2010. Codes of conduct must be changed to include a requirement for councillors to promote equality in their actions and behaviour.

Standards committees to be established

Local authorities should be required to establish a formal standards committee, elected by full council on an annual basis, representative of party political make-up, and with a clear process for individuals to make complaints. The Secretary of State should change the law so that these committees have the power to suspend councillors as an ultimate sanction. The Secretary of State should open discussions with the LGA on establishing a higher arbiter of appeals against local standards committee decisions

Changing Council Culture

The examples quoted in this chapter demonstrate some of the direct misogyny that our women councillors experience. Alongside this we heard repeatedly about the way that male councillors, within a macho, combative culture in council chambers, often silence or appropriate women’s voices.

Women councillors told us about their ideas being ignored – until they were raised by other male councillors, at which point they were praised. In some cases, we heard about entire policy ideas being adopted from women councillors without credit or a role in their implementation.

The survey data from our interim report found that more women than men felt that their contributions were ignored in the council chamber – 63 percent compared with 52 percent of men. However, the very high proportion of male councillors who said they felt this was a barrier suggests that the political culture in council chambers is restricting for all members, not just women.

Milton Keynes Fawcett Group conducted analysis in 2015 of their local authority’s Full Council meetings, and found that although women made up 33 percent of councillors in the room, they contributed only 19 percent of interventions, suggesting that the ‘ownership’ of the debate by men that they witnessed had the effect of closing down women’s voices.⁴⁹

49 Milton Keynes Fawcett Society, (2015), *Exploring women’s participation in local politics: A report on observations and analysis of Milton Keynes Council meetings July-December 2015*

“There is a married couple – the chair very often calls the male to speak even if his wife’s light is on! I have been asked to speak in a public Licensing meeting by the chair saying “.....err.....you” because he couldn’t remember my name. If several lights are on the men have opportunity to speak first. When you do speak your remarks are often brushed over and the men asked for comments twice.”

White British Conservative woman borough councillor, 45-54

This evidence suggests that the political culture is a barrier to women councillors staying in their roles, and progressing. But we also heard from a number of women that the behaviour within the council chamber was a barrier to their efforts to encourage more women to stand for local government. The culture has an impact on the pipeline – in order to bring more women in we also need to make local government a more inviting environment.

“I have asked a number of women to think of standing for election but having attended council meetings with rude heckling and silly faux parliamentary behaviour, they have all said nothing on earth would induce them to lay themselves open to such treatment.”

Caroline Page, Liberal Democrat Suffolk County Councillor

Achieving cultural change is difficult. As well as education and sanctions for unacceptable behaviour, it is dependent on changing the makeup of councils, which we make recommendations on above, and on women and allies calling together for change, which we make recommendations on further into the report. But we propose some structural changes that we think may have a positive impact on council culture.

Firstly, council leaders and chairs need to understand the need for change and the nature of discrimination in order to provide leadership on this issue. We recommend that they should undertake unconscious bias training, which is available from providers across the country.

At one of our evidence sessions, Cllr Kay Twitchen who was then a councillor on Essex County Council highlighted the value that her council had seen from audio recording and publishing council meetings in full on their website. This practice enables transparency – councillors making unacceptable or discriminatory comments know that their behaviour is much more public than if their residents were to rely on the official minutes or accounts from people who are in the room. It is a low cost change, requiring limited additional officer time. We recommend that this is adopted by all councils.

Finally, we heard an example of good practice whereby a county council had reformed the role of its Chief Whip to be a non-executive role with responsibility for promoting the code of conduct and general member behaviour. We believe that having a senior councillor identified whose role is to promote a culture change could be a useful tool.

Standards, training, and transparency

With clear standards in place, councils should provide councillors with appropriate training to tackle discrimination, and enable transparency through publishing audio recordings in order to monitor behaviour.

Establish a role to oversee member conduct

Local authorities should establish a formal role to oversee member conduct and promoting equality in their next constitution review. Some councils have used the Chief Whip for this role; the chair of the formal standards committee may also be appropriate

HELPING HER – NETWORKS, MENTORING, BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Women councillors are less likely to have access to the informal networks within local government where real power lies.

There are insufficient mentoring opportunities for women councillors.

44 percent of women compared with 24 percent of male councillors cited a lack of confidence.

“I think many women lack confidence so don’t put themselves forward. There is a tendency to think they need to gain more experience first – men don’t seem so bothered about this. Encouragement and women-only training sessions is helpful – particularly things like public speaking.”

Lorna Reith, Haringey Labour Councillor

An argument is sometimes made that we need to ‘fix the women’ in order to fix the problem of women’s underrepresentation. Our commission, unsurprisingly, does not agree. However, our interim report found that women are more likely than men at every level to feel that excluded from informal networks, where much of the actual decision making takes place. 31 percent said they lacked access to these networks within the party (25 percent of men), and 47 percent within the town hall setting (36 percent of men).

There is a real need to provide women with a setting in which to establish networks that can counterbalance and challenge the ‘old boys’ clubs’, where they persist. In addition, within the male-dominated environment of the council chamber, our survey found that women were more likely than men to tell us that confidence was a barrier for them, with 44 percent of women compared with 24 percent of male councillors citing this issue. More women than men also feel that a lack of training and support holds them back.

When we asked councillors what solutions they wanted to see to shift the dial in terms of progression, mentoring and women’s networks had high levels of support across the board. Contributors to our evidence sessions affirmed that there is a significant need for these to be developed.

Many local authorities already provide either formal or informal mentoring, within party groups and across party lines. However, not all do, and where mentoring is provided it is sometimes not well advertised. Councils should build on the good work that is already going on to ensure that every new councillor, and especially every new woman councillor, is proactively offered support from a senior councillor as soon as they take up their role. Some women will prefer to be supported by another woman councillor, but where they are comfortable for that support to come from a senior male councillor this could help to alleviate the additional workload for the relatively few women in senior councillor positions.

Mentoring relationships can be positive, but research literature from within the private sector suggests that an alternative which is often more effective at ensuring women’s advancement is sponsorship.⁵⁰ While mentoring can often focus on psychosocial support, sponsorship sees a person in a senior role proactively seek to advance another person’s career. We recommend that it is this model which is offered to women councillors. It is important that those sponsors are supported by democratic services officers to provide as effective support as possible.

The Fawcett Society and the LGiU plan to respond to the clear call from women across local government, both councillors and officers, for an opportunity to share experiences, support career progression, and campaign together to tackle the barriers women face in local government. We are now developing plans to begin to set up regional local government gender equality networks.

50 Workplace Gender Equality Agency, (2016), *Supporting careers: mentoring or sponsorship?*, Perspective paper, Australian Government; Tammy Allen et. al., (2004) ‘Career benefits associated with mentoring for protégés: A meta-analysis’, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89:1, 127-136

These would be open to women (and male allies), from across party and councillor/officer divides. We propose to launch pilot networks, building on contacts we have developed through the Commission, co-developing a model alongside women in local government that can then be rolled out sustainably throughout the sector.

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) has also expressed enthusiasm for developing a Wales-wide network, and we plan to work with them and other partners in the Welsh women's sector to put this in to practice.

“I was successfully elected and my experience of the process was largely positive. But we all meet men who find it hard to accept women. I found that there was little support for me in my new role and I was reluctant to ask. Men elected at the same time seemed to get more help and advice from more experienced male colleagues.”

White British Labour woman councillor, 55-64, first term

Provide active sponsorship of new councillors

All local authorities should introduce active sponsorship schemes for all new councillors, and ensure women councillors are encouraged to take them up, in to help them progress.

Establish regional gender equality networks

We call for the establishment of regional, cross-party, gender equality networks open to councillors and officers. These would build informal networks, and support women and allies to challenge the structures and cultures that hold women back in town halls. Fawcett and the LGiU plan to lead in setting these up.

LEADERSHIP

Councillors

Women make up just 17 percent of council leaders, one in four directly elected mayors, and four of the 22 Welsh leaders.

Women comprise just 30 percent of cabinet members overall, but this rises to 40 percent where the leader is a woman. Nine councils have all-male cabinets.

Just one in seven Finance or Economic Development roles are held by women.

42% of women councillors say women are 'pigeonholed' into certain roles.

Our interim report found that women made up just 17 percent of council leaders, and one in four directly elected mayors, in England. There are now four women council leaders in Wales, following the 2017 election, out of a total of 22 leaders. With women's representation broadly flat over the last two decades, this is not a case of leadership taking time to catch up with councillor-level representation – there are clearly additional barriers to women progressing to the top.

Cabinet Makeup

“Certain cabinet roles are seen as better than others. When I moved from a fuzzy social cohesion type role to a housing role in the cabinet people congratulated me on my ‘promotion’, although it was a sideways move in terms of seniority and pay.”

Pakistani Labour woman cabinet member, 25-34

Many council leaders, if they have not come in to their roles from opposition, will have previously been cabinet members. Research over a decade ago by Bochel and Bochel found that women are more likely to hold senior roles in “‘caring’ areas, such as social services and social inclusion, education or community or neighbourhood services, and are less likely to have responsibility for fields such as economic development and regeneration or corporate affairs”.⁵¹ The Centre for Women and Democracy has more recently shown that a significant proportion of council leaders, prior to their leadership, held corporate services, finance, or economic development portfolios.⁵²

This research is echoed in our survey data, which showed that 42 percent of women councillors felt that women being ‘pigeonholed into particular types of senior roles’ was a key factor behind women’s underrepresentation at leadership level.

In order to understand whether this persists, we analysed the composition of cabinets on the 306 English and Welsh councils which have a cabinet structure, and where cabinet roles are publicly stated. Given the greater variety of arrangements outside cabinet structures, we have not analysed their breakdown by gender at this time. As well as looking at women’s representation overall we have summarised the many various names given to cabinet posts into 18 roles, and assessed the degree to which these are gender segregated. Full tables for this data are given in Appendix 4.

51 C. Bochel and H. Bochel, ‘Women and Labour’s Modernisation of Local Government in the UK’, European Consortium for Political Research Joint Sessions, (Copenhagen, 14-19 April 2000)

52 CfWD, (2012) *Interim Report of 2012 (Women in the 2012 Local Elections)*

Women in cabinet

“Leaders who have all or nearly all male cabinets need to be named and shamed. They are missing out on a huge talent pool”

Catherine Rankin, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Conservative Health and Scrutiny chair

We found that on average, women hold 30 percent of cabinet positions. This varies by political party – if the Conservative Party has control of the council (162 councils) this reduces to 26 percent, but increases to 38 percent if Labour have control of the council (94 councils). As significant, however, is the fact that the ratio rises significantly to 40 percent if the leader is female (44 councils), or 39 percent if the deputy leader is female (80 councils). If both the leader and deputy leader are female, cabinets are a little over gender equal (12 councils).

But in councils where both the leader and deputy leader are male, which is true of 168 councils in England, women hold just 25 percent of the cabinet positions on average. This is problematic both from a perspective of ensuring women are represented in these positions of power, but also in terms of having fewer women on the path to the council leader role in those authorities where men currently hold the top job.

We found that there are nine councils out of the 306 which have no women whatsoever holding cabinet positions.⁵³ Just 22 percent of councils have equal representation.

Women are less well represented on cabinets in Wales, where they hold 25 percent of cabinet roles. This falls to 13 percent on the two Conservative-controlled councils and rises to 37 percent of the 7 Labour controlled councils. A better proportion of 29 percent and 34 percent exists on the councils where there is a female leader or deputy leader respectively, but as in England, in the 11 councils where both positions are filled by men only 22 percent of cabinet members are women. 2 Welsh councils do not have any women in cabinet.⁵⁴

Jobs for the boys (and girls)

“The women in cabinet all do excellent and important jobs. However, I always find it interesting that they are given portfolios like, health, culture, children’s, etc. They are never given finance roles and the budget planning is done by men. This seems to be borne out historically in our group and I’ve seen it reflected in many other councils. Another role that never seems to get filled by women in Labour Groups is Chief Whip.”

White British Labour city councillor, 25-34

We found that the pattern of women occupying traditionally feminised cabinet roles, and men occupying traditionally masculinised roles, persists. In England women are significantly outnumbered in ‘Transport’ (1:9 women: men ratio), ‘Finance/Resources’ (1:6), ‘Business/Economic Development’ (1:6), ‘Planning/Regeneration’ (1:4), and ‘Corporate/Transformation/Policy’ (1:4) – the portfolios that have been previously found to be linked with progression to the top. Men and women were almost equally represented, however, despite having far fewer women in cabinet, in ‘Health and Social Care’, ‘Education’, ‘Children’s Social Care’ and ‘Customer Services’ roles.

The gendering of roles is even greater amongst the smaller number of Welsh councils, with a ratio of 1:9 in the regeneration role, and in finance positions, although the ratio in corporate roles was less severe at 1:3.

53 Those councils are: Crawley, Forest Heath, Lichfield, Mansfield, Mendip, Preston, Rutland, Selby, and Swale.

54 Those councils are Blaenau Gwent and Vale of Glamorgan.

This gendering seems to persist on council committees outside of the cabinet. The LGA's census of 2013 shows that the roles that women are allocated on local partnership groups or boards also appear to be gendered, with 12.4% of women councillors having a role on Health and Wellbeing boards compared with 7.8% of male councillors, whilst only 2% of women councillors were members of the Local Enterprise Partnership compared with 3.9% of men.⁵⁵

It is important firstly to note that at least half of the money paid in council tax is spent on either children's or adults' social services – the areas which women are more likely to be given responsibility for.⁵⁶ The gender split does not mean that women are less likely, relative to their proportionate representation, to be in high-spending portfolios.

There is a need both to ensure that women are better represented in the portfolios that are currently male-dominated and which are viewed as the path to leadership. But there is also a need to more effectively value the work done in the social care and other gendered portfolios as a path to leadership.

As a step to tackling the former issue, we recommend that councils look at having assistant cabinet roles – essentially a form of shadowing and support for cabinet councillors, to enable a wider group of members to gain an understanding of the council's activity and to provide a route for progression. These roles should be filled on a gender equal basis to ensure that there are women in the pipeline for cabinet roles.

Our research shows that local government is heavily reliant on women council leaders and deputy leaders for the 30 percent of women who are currently in cabinet roles. In the many situations where we have only men in leadership roles, women are only a quarter of council cabinets – they are alienated from the positions of power that make decisions impacting millions of women's lives. This in turn impacts negatively on the pipeline that leads to more women in the top council leader positions.

We believe that requiring at least 50 percent representation of women on cabinets is required in order to make this change. This proposal was supported by 39 percent of women councillors we surveyed. For almost all councils there is not a mathematical problem with meeting this requirement,⁵⁷ and where the selection is from a small number of women we hope this functions as a spur for those councils to bring more women into the pipeline. No party currently has this requirement in place, although the Labour Party Rulebook states "that the Party expects Labour cabinets to reflect the diversity of the area represented by the local authority as far as possible."⁵⁸

We call on local councils to adopt this change in their own local constitutions, with a local system to be agreed where cabinet members are voted in. Councils with committee systems should look to introduce a similar requirement for their chairs. Where councils have odd numbers of either, they should aim for at least the next highest percentage below 50 percent that is possible.

Adopt a requirement for gender balanced leadership

Local Authorities must adopt within their constitution a requirement for at least 50 percent of cabinet members, and chairs of committees, to be women. Political parties must adopt this as their national policy.

Create new leadership roles & support women into leadership positions

Local authorities should consider introducing assistant or deputy cabinet member roles, filled on a gender equal basis, so that women are enabled to develop the skills and knowledge to take on leadership roles.

55 National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013, Local Government Association

56 Tamsin Rutter, (24 March 2015), 'How each £1 paid in council tax is spent', Guardian Public Leaders Network, <https://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2015/mar/24/how-council-tax-pound-spent>

57 Craven District Council and Rutland County Council, with 4 women each, are the unfortunate exceptions.

58 Labour Party, (2017), *Labour Party Rulebook*, Part 7, Clause IX

As well as bringing more women in, we propose that councils should be open to changing their working practices at cabinet level in order to enable more women to engage. One route that this could take would be introducing cabinet level job-shares. Bristol City Council has operated in this way in the past, with two Green women councillors sharing the role of Assistant Mayor for Neighbourhoods in order to balance the role with childcare.⁵⁹ Swansea Council now has two women councillors sharing the 'Future Generations' portfolio, following the 2017 election.⁶⁰ This is a positive innovation, and we would encourage the Department for Communities and Local Government to explore the legislation underlying this role to ensure that the ten-member limit on cabinets does not unnecessarily restrict its further use.

Women Leaders' Experiences

“Everyday sexist language – worse than the city of London”

Councillor Louise McKinley

To better understand the experience of women at the top, Anne Baldwin from the Women's Local Government Society conducted in-depth interviews with 9 women council leaders and 3 BAME women deputy leaders (there are currently no BAME women council leaders in England and Wales). While these women do not form a representative sample of the 56 women council leaders and 4 directly elected mayors, the challenges and successes they face give us an insight into the role. They are listed in Appendix 3.

Becoming a leader

Changes in council leadership can occur in a variety of ways, and it follows that no two of the women leaders interviewed experienced just the same path to leadership. Nevertheless, there did appear to be an overlying trend that the women concerned became leader (or leader of an opposition group) when a vacancy occurred. Although their election may still have been contested, on the whole most women in this sample were not directly challenging a previous long standing leader.

The women interviewed sometimes took on leadership when there was a need to repair, either after political electoral loss or when a council faced unusually demanding problems. The most extreme example of this in the sample was perhaps Cllr Clare Kober (Labour), elected to the leadership of Haringey in the aftermath of issues surrounding children's services. This reflects similar findings in the private sector amongst women CEOs and the recent example of Cllr Elizabeth Campbell, who became leader of Kensington and Chelsea in the wake of the Grenfell disaster.⁶¹

Women council leaders recognised the need for negotiation before ballot. In some cases, women had direct conversations with every member of their political group to gauge support. About half the women leaders interviewed had not contemplated leadership before the opportunity arose. Even where prior consideration has been given to taking on the role, having support and encouragement, either from council colleagues or other political mentors, is vital.

Being a council leader

The leaders interviewed described a wide range of responsibilities. Invariably, leaders were looking to external partnerships and alliances to deliver their strategic vision and saw their role as leading them. That vision focused on the need to change the town or city as much as any need to change the council internally. The challenges of developing such wide partnerships, especially in rural areas, places extra demands on all our leaders.

Being a leader with a broad external focus means women will often find themselves as a small minority in a room even if their council has a reasonable gender balance. Several respondents described attending meetings with other local leaders where this was the case.

59 Discussion with Cllr Fi Hance, one of the two women

60 Swansea Council press release, (May 2017), 'New cabinet to deliver £1 billion City Deal' <http://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/34477/New-cabinet-to-deliver-1-billion-City-Deal>

61 Ken Favaro, Per-Ola Karlsson, Gary L. Neilson (2014), *The 2013 Chief Executive Study: Women CEOs of the last 10 years*, PriceWaterhouseCoopers

Most women had to be prompted to mention home and family life in describing their daily activities. Those who had other employment when first elected as a councillor had ceased all such activities when leadership roles developed. Cllr Louise McKinley (Brentwood, Conservative) is amongst those who have made choices to retain a work-life balance. She does manage to juggle leading a district council with raising two toddlers but only with good family back up and lots of planning. She did take a decision to step back from an LGA role to be able to develop other activities.

She is not alone in combining leadership with raising a young family. Four out of the sample of nine leaders and two of the deputy leaders mentioned how they combined being a councillor with raising a family. Experiences were mixed, with some convinced they could not have personally taken on a senior role until children were older, but two or three of the sample were more positive. Whilst being a council leader demands lots of time, it also has elements of flexibility that make it possible to plan around the demands of different roles. This was something Cllr Clare Kober described, having had two children since becoming leader; 'if you can set it up right, being in a leading position in Local Government and having young children can be helpful.... you start to see the world differently; it provides good connections to other bits of the community you would not otherwise see'.

Many leaders were positive about the role itself, too. Some recognised, however, that not all councillors would choose leadership. As Cllr Donna Jones (Portsmouth, Conservative) summarised, a "thick skin" is needed, and the ability to "not take it personally" after a tough day. Again, encouragement is often needed – "women have a thousand reasons why not" one respondent added. Practical barriers were recognised, but many of our sample recognised they were also role models and had a personal responsibility to encourage other women in all walks of life.

One successful leader who has no intentions of packing it in could still describe the negative, and was especially concerned about the negative impact on family of having to take unpopular decisions in a world where social media leaves all open to constant scrutiny: "women can often be perceived as an easier target than men in on-line bullying.... I have had threats on social media, comments about appearance, hate mail, horrible emails about my children ... your life is no longer your own, people know where you are ... it can be quite brutal ... you are paid peanuts and people are horrible to you."

Building networks

The interviews approached networking and mentoring from two perspectives: how women leaders supported each other and how they encouraged others.

For Cllr Sue Jeffrey (Redcar and Cleveland, Labour) the greatest barrier to joining in networks of women leaders was that most current activity of that nature is London based. Travelling not only costs time, but travelling, conferences and training generate expenses that can soon be viewed as 'profligate' expenditure by the electorate.

There was substantial evidence that leadership training provided by the LGA was valued, and had led to continued formal and informal networking amongst leaders. Leaders were active in encouraging others to develop through attending training, but none had established specific internal training for others. However, several were involved in mentoring externally and offering more general member development internally. In several cases women leaders were able to identify others they might encourage to grow into future leaders. Support offered was usually on a one-to-one basis rather than formal training.

How far they were able to encourage other women in a practical way is reflected in the way women leaders shared out cabinet positions. It became clear in discussion that leaders had to balance many interests in building a successful cabinet. The ability to promote women was therefore mixed, as was the degree to which leaders were able to appoint their cabinet without any role for the political group. Some also had to contend with maintaining cross party alliances through their choice of cabinet members. This was particularly complex for Cllr Ellen ap Gwynn (Plaid Cymru) in Ceredigion, who leads an alliance and who has just two other women

in her own political group of eighteen. For Councillor Izzie Seccombe (Warwickshire, Conservative) in a County Council, the need to include a geographic balance could be as important as the drive for equal gender representation. Encouraging good women to take on more was part of the way of operating for her, but choice of cabinet members did also need to reflect ability as well as geography. Most leaders were conscious of the need to aim for a balanced cabinet, but had other competing priorities.

Women leaders varied in whether they personally wanted to be part of women-only networks. Nevertheless, even if they did not wish to participate in them, most women valued the potential available for women to network in a supportive way. Cllr Jennifer Mein (Lancashire, Labour) suggested perhaps online networking might provide part of the answer. It was clear from the descriptions of networking that the first priority for women leaders was to get the job done. They would network with those they needed to meet to achieve that.

BAME Women Deputy Leaders

The BAME women deputy leaders interviewed were all young, Labour councillors.⁶² They all described needing encouragement to stand as deputy leaders, or were appointed by leaders – all three were strongly supportive of their council leaders, and would wait until they were no longer in role to consider leadership themselves.

For two of the deputies interviewed, the role came through supporting a male challenge to a previous leader. In one case, the continued presence of a previous long standing leadership did lead to some difficulties. For Cllr Sabia Hussain in Slough, it was the fact that both the newly elected leader and deputy were from the same ethnic group that led to most adverse reaction. Hostilities to their election also meant the cabinet was unable to include a gender balance. This hostility did also include very personal challenges on ability, with an assumption from some that her lack of experience meant she would be ‘immature for the role’ and that it ‘wasn’t her time’.

All three ethnic minority deputy leaders interviewed cited strong community activism as a great strength. Cllr Syeda Khatun in Sandwell has 17 years of experience as a councillor and has an MBE for her services to the community. Despite this experience and her clear commitment she was only appointed to cabinet in 2015, even though she knew she was capable of such a role earlier. She was well aware of that as a Bangladeshi woman she faced more barriers than most and had encouraged others who shared her background to become magistrates and school governors. She had previously relied on her mother for childcare, unable to pay for childcare support from the council allowance. As with Cllr Saima Ashraf in Barking and Dagenham, she could only find time for the deputy leadership role now her children were older. As a Muslim woman, her experience of casework was that many women would come to her who did not want to approach other councillors.

All three women deputy leaders were keen on both networking and training opportunities. Two of them mentioned favourably the support they had through a mentor provided via the LGA, whilst Syeda has just been accepted to join the Jo Cox Leadership programme being developed in the Labour Party. Saima also mentioned how good the support from the LGA in general was. All three mentioned in some way their own ‘open door’ policy and expressed a general desire to encourage other women, not just from their own communities. Their own backgrounds bring a wealth of varied experience to their respective councils. Saima in particular, having arrived in the country twelve years ago and living in a hostel after fleeing domestic violence, has a very personal commitment to justice and equality that can only enhance her council.

What do women leaders recommend?

A number of themes came through when women council leaders were asked to recommend changes that would increase their numbers. The profile of women leaders was important, with many pointing to the need to have more women council leaders shaping national policy, given a prominent role at party conferences, and represented in the media. Some had promoted achievement awards to enhance women’s profile locally.

Other recommendations focussed on approaches to building up the pipeline of women councillors. This included head-hunting local talent through the use of a recruitment consultant and directly targeting community

62 Our search was not able to identify any BAME women deputy leaders or leaders in the Conservative or Liberal Democrat parties

activists. Despite rising to the top, our women council leaders described continuing to experience sexism – from being asked if she was likely to have more children in a selection meeting, to everyday sexist language which Cllr Louise McKinley described as worse than the City of London.

Many leaders recognised the importance of practical support, from childcare and family support to tackling the insecurity and low financial reward of a leadership role. We hope that our recommendations in preceding chapters, if adopted, would begin to change things in these areas.

Leaders were positive about the LGA's training programmes and mentoring – but felt they needed to do more to headhunt potential women leaders, who might not currently consider themselves to be on that pathway. Training and leadership development programmes need to recognise that women may need to be asked, and don't always see themselves as future leaders.

The tendency for women interviewed to fill vacancies, rather than challenging incumbents, further makes the case for the term limits proposed elsewhere in this report.

Proactively seek out and target women councillors for leadership programmes

The LGA should continue to actively seek out women councillors who could take on leadership roles through training and mentoring programmes, and ensure that its structures and public presence are gender balanced.

Senior council officers

78 percent of the local government workforce are women yet at the top male Chief Executives outnumber women two to one.

73 percent of women Chief Executives felt that there was not a sufficient gender balance at the most senior levels of local government. Over half felt that political, organizational, or professional cultures in local authorities were the cause of under-representation in senior roles, while 48 percent felt that caring responsibilities were a key factor.⁶³

Women make up the vast majority – 78 percent – of the 1.6 million local government employees in England and Wales. Fewer women work in full time local government roles, but they still make up 61 percent of full time staff, while 88 percent of part-time local government staff are women.⁶⁴ Local government employment is falling overall, with a 3 percent year on year fall of 68,000 jobs in 2016, although some of this represents a transfer to central government of education roles.⁶⁵ Research from 2012 found that there is a great deal of gendered segregation of occupations within local government. Women made up 96 percent of home care workers and 85 percent of residential social care workers, but only 7 percent of building control workers and 37 percent of environmental health workers.⁶⁶

63 Solace, *Solace Women's Survey 2015*, <http://solacesummit16.co.uk/presentations/DS14%20-%20Women%E2%80%99s%20Leadership%20Survey%202015.pdf>

64 Local Government Association, <http://local.gov.uk/research-statistical-alert>, citing Office for National Statistics, *Quarterly Public Sector Employee Survey, Q3 2016*

65 Office for National Statistics, *Public Sector Employment: September 2016*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel/bulletins/publicsectoremployment/september2016>

66 John Harvey, (2012), 'Employment trends: women in local government', The Guardian Local Leaders Network blog, citing the Local Government Employers Survey <https://www.theguardian.com/local-government-network/statsblog/2012/aug/07/employment-trends-women-local-government>

The high proportions of women in council workforces does not translate into progression into higher paying jobs. The LGA's Workforce Survey for 2015/16 found that the average proportion of women in the top 5 percent of earners in councils was only 45 percent – a figure which had barely moved since 2011/12.⁶⁷

At the very top of councils, we see fewer women still. Our research finds that of 353 councils in England, 32 percent (111 councils) are headed up by a woman.⁶⁸ This is some way from equality, although it is a significant improvement on 24 percent in 2014. This figure has risen gradually from 13 percent when data began in 2003, but there is still considerable progress required for chief executives to reflect the female-dominated workforce.⁶⁹ The picture in Wales is worse, with just four of the 22 councils headed by women – the same proportion as for Welsh council leaders.

Solace workforce survey

The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace) surveyed their women's group in 2015, hearing from women chief executives, senior managers, and graduate staff. They found that 73 percent felt that there was not a sufficient gender balance at the most senior levels of local government. They felt this was particularly true in sectors like IT, Highways, Waste Services, and Planning. Over half felt that political, organizational, or professional cultures in local authorities were the cause of under-representation in senior roles, while 48 percent felt that caring responsibilities were a key factor.⁷⁰ These two key factors were raised by many of the officer respondents to our consultation.

Flexibility and Caring Responsibilities

“When young and often single men run things in my council, they don't seem to be able to relate to the experience of those of us who have caring responsibilities or who just have a life outside of work. If I can't attend a meeting, the reaction is usually, don't worry we'll update you, not you are a valuable member of the team and we should find another way to include you. So little use of technology like videoconferencing, so many meetings full of guys in grey suits.”

Mixed ethnicity woman local government officer, 45-54

One of the chief barriers to progression that women, who still take on the majority of caring responsibilities in our society, face across industries is a lack of flexible or part time work in higher-skill jobs with good pay and progression. Research suggests this is the case in local authority roles too, with few senior jobs being advertised as part time and progression requiring senior officers to be constantly available with no flexibility.⁷¹ The LGA's research finds that only 46 percent of councils advertise jobs as offering flexible working at present.⁷²

We heard through our consultation that support for flexible working is often formally in place in local government. However, often this formal commitment does not translate into practice. In some cases, the reductions in local government budgets had an impact on this failure to support flexibility – we heard about requests for flexible working being denied because, given staff cuts, working significantly more than standard hours had become the expectation. Other women local government officers described how progression to the top of council officer structures often relies on presenteeism and long hours, and how limited support is offered to ensure that people who work flexibly are able to access the opportunities that lead to senior roles.

67 Local Government Association (2017), *Local Government Workforce Survey 2015/16*, <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Workforce%20Survey%202015-16%20report%20final%20201704120.pdf>

68 This figure is on a per council basis (so shared chief executives are counted twice), and is based on the Chief Executive, or Head of Paid Service for councils who do not have a chief executive role. At the time of counting one council – Liverpool – had neither in place, and one – Hart – had a female/male job-share in place.

69 Centre for Women and Democracy, *Sex and Power 2014* http://www.cfwd.org.uk/uploads/Sex_and_PowerV4%20FINAL.pdf

70 Solace, *Solace Women's Survey 2015*, <http://solacesummit16.co.uk/presentations/DS14%20-%20Women%E2%80%99s%20Leadership%20Survey%202015.pdf>

71 Bennett, Tang, and Yeadle, (2012), *Women's Career Development in Local Authorities: Synthesis report*, Centre for Social Inclusion; Sheffield, <http://www.sociology.leeds.ac.uk/assets/files/Circle/women-career-synthesis.pdf>

72 Local Government Association, (2017), *Ibid.*

“It is not enough to have family-friendly or anti-discriminatory policies without changing what really goes on in practice. In one council, I worked for a female senior manager who initially came back from maternity leave on short-ish days. Her male boss regularly used to ‘joke’, saying things like “oh, part-time are you now?” when she needed to leave to pick up her child. This derision used to cause her unnecessary stress and forced her to work late just to prove she was up to the job. It also sent a strong message to other women that, to be successful, you needed to be seen to work late and be at the beck and call of the leadership. Ironically, this was an organization that prided itself on promoting work-life balance.”

Janice Jouannou, consultant working within local government

Political culture and sexism

“Presenting to full council I was called a “little girl”, belittled and argued with despite reporting back with expert advice they had requested... Local government does tend to employ more women, they don’t tend to reach the top though... When councillors dismiss you out of hand, and you are asked to act as secretary at a meeting you are chairing, this isn’t going to change any time soon in local government. There is nobody to speak to about it.”

White British woman former local government policy officer, 25-34

Many of the women local government officers who we engaged with through the Commission described woeful experiences of sexist behaviour, both from other officers and, in many cases, from male councillors. Younger women officers in particular repeatedly raised being belittled by male councillors, often publicly and without any challenge from others who were present. Outdated gender stereotypes were often at the root of the comments women received, with councillors airing beliefs that women should be at home rather than in the workplace. The same sexist culture that holds back women councillors is unsurprisingly a day-to-day issue for many women who work as council officers.

“In my experience barriers I have had involve senior members of staff and how they recruit into roles within their departments. I have been questioned at interviews about my childcare arrangements and the ages of my children. I have had colleagues expressing gender preferences for certain roles that included out of hours working.”

White British woman former local government officer, 45-54

Sexist views held by senior councillors also represents a clear block on the ability of women in local government to progress. Councillors often sit on the interview panel for Director and Chief Executive level roles, and often influence recruitment decisions below that level. Women responding to the Solace survey felt that male councillors in these positions often valued working and leadership styles that were ‘traditionally male’, rather than the distributed, collaborative approach to council leadership that is needed to face the challenges of local government in the 21st century.⁷³

Women local government officers who had worked on senior-level recruitment described being shocked at the levels of bias shown by the councillors involved in it. Where unconscious bias training was offered, it was often minimal and officers did not feel empowered to call out prejudiced decision-making. The prejudice women council officers described seeing was not just on the basis of gender – many respondents to our survey highlighted a significant lack of representation of BAME and disabled women in senior council officer roles. Our recommendation for leaders to undertake unconscious bias training would, we hope, begin to address this.

A clear finding from our evidence session on women council officers was that more needs to be done to build solidarity and support networks between women council officers and women councillors. Women councillors

⁷³ Catherine Needham and Catherine Mangan, *The 21st Century Public Servant*, University of Birmingham <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/public-service-academy/news-events/2014/21-century-report-28-10-14.pdf>

felt that having women officers in senior roles supported them significantly to challenge negative cultures, and to stay and progress in their roles, and women council officers felt that they would value more support from women councillors when officers faced sexism.

“Frankly if it wasn’t for women officers around me, at every single level, there would be no way I would have learnt or even continued as a councillor...”

Victoria Quinn, Birmingham City Council Labour Overview and Scrutiny Chair

It is vital that local authorities support women council officers to rise to the top. Respondents to the Solace survey felt that more diverse teams led to improved outcomes for councils; and that having fewer women at the top led to a deficit in skills that women are more likely to possess. Asked about what Solace could do to improve women’s progression, developing a women’s mentoring scheme was the most popular choice with 62 percent of respondents asking for it, reflecting other research which has cited mentoring as a relationship that can support women to progress.⁷⁴

Open up all senior roles to flexible working or part-time by default

Local authorities should offer all roles, including senior roles, as flexible working and part-time by default, unless there is a clear business case otherwise. This must be backed up by a genuine organizational commitment to viewing flexible working on equal terms with traditional working patterns.

Local authority gender equality networks to include women officers

Local authorities must support the development of gender equality networks so that councillor allies can support women local government officers in challenging sexism that they experience.

74 Bennett, Tang, and Yeadle (2012), Ibid.

DEVOLUTION

All of the metro mayors are male. 9 in 10 seats at the top table of Combined Authorities are occupied by men.

In some regions, none of the combined authority representatives are women.

“I worry that where power is devolved to one person, that person will almost inevitably be a man.”

White British Labour woman councillor, 35-44 years old

Devolution matters. The ten deals agreed to date will see an additional £7.4bn invested over 30 years,⁷⁵ and as well as this funding policy areas that are central to all of our lives such as transport and social care are being taken control of at the city region level. Some of the momentum behind further devolution deals may have stalled at the end of the last Parliament, with deals in the North East and Lincolnshire not advancing. But all of the major party manifestos at the recent election supported transferring more powers, so the pace of change may resume.

But this radical shift of responsibilities and budgets away from Whitehall has not been accompanied by public enthusiasm and engagement. Turnout in the May 2017 metro mayor elections ranged from 21 percent in the Tees Valley to 29 percent in Greater Manchester and the West of England – better than the disastrously low turnout for Police and Crime Commissioner elections, but not significantly so.⁷⁶ The opportunity for power to be meaningfully transferred down to communities through devolution looks to be at risk.

This commission began its work by looking at women’s representation in the Northern Powerhouse city regions.⁷⁷ We found that the new structures risked handing power to male-dominated structures and shutting women out of the decision making process, with women making up just 21 percent of council leaders and directly elected mayors in the region, only one in seven of the chairs of established and proposed combined authorities, and 28 percent of senior leadership roles.⁷⁸ This was despite women making up 40 percent of local councillors in those regions, a far better proportion than across England.

The candidates for the 2017 metro mayor elections did little to change this, with only seven women candidates amongst the total of 39 announced prior to the elections.⁷⁹ With the unexpected defeat of Labour’s Sue Jeffrey in Tees Valley, and Lesley Mansell’s loss in the West of England, neither of the two women candidates from a major party were elected. White men hold all six of the metro mayor positions.

This stands in stark contrast to the principles which informed devolution in Wales and saw 50:50 representation in the Assembly by 2003. It is unacceptable in the 21st century for new, powerful institutions to be created with no regard for gender equality or diversity, and instead ensuring male power and dominance.

Many respondents to our commission felt that an electoral system that relied on ‘heroic’ leadership and concentrated power into one person’s hands could put off women from standing. This may be the case, but as long as this structure does exist in some city regions, political parties – particularly the two main parties – must develop a strategy across the different areas to ensure that women candidates are put forward. In line with the Women and Equalities Select Committee’s report, we also call for the Government to enable all-women shortlists for metro mayor elections, so that parties can legally choose to use this tool at that level.⁸⁰

75 National Audit Office (2016), *English Devolution Deals: Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General*, HC 948, Session 2015-16

76 Georgina Blakely and Brendan Evans, (2017), ‘To gain legitimacy new metro mayors must improve turnout and diversity’, SPERI blog post <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2017/05/11/to-gain-legitimacy-new-metro-mayors-must-improve-turnout-and-diversity/>

77 At that point we looked at Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Sheffield City Region Combined Authority, North East Combined Authority, Tees Valley Combined Authority and the councils which comprised the Humber LEP.

78 Defined as leaders, deputy leaders, chief executives, and Combined Authority chairs.

79 Terry, Chris, *From City Hall to Citizens’ Hall: Democracy, diversity, and English devolution*, (Electoral Reform Society, 2017)

80 Women and Equalities Select Committee, 2016, *Ibid.*

Permit all-women shortlists for metro mayor elections

The Government should amend legislation to allow political parties to use all-women shortlists for metro mayoral elections. Political parties should take a strategic view across the next round of mayoral elections to ensure that women candidates are put forward in winnable races.

Devolution to English local government is not happening in a vacuum, as the UK political apparatus has devolved power in the past – most notably, to Scotland and Wales. In the latter case, there was a concerted focus on equality in the design of new political structures, and on the part of parties, and as a result the National Assembly was the first devolved government to achieve a 50/50 gender balance.⁸¹ But in subsequent years this progress has fallen away, and the Assembly has returned to 42% women. It is clear that gender equality needs to be formally designed-in, and that maintaining it requires a continued focus.

Formal structures

“Devolution’ is likely to be appalling for gender equality. Concentrating focus on a few key posts will generate increased conflict and competition which, as discussed earlier, tends to discourage women. For the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough mayor the mechanism for appointing members to the Combined Authority concentrates majority privilege and is the antithesis of diversity good practice. As a result, the Combined Authority is currently entirely male and it is likely the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will fare little better.”

Zoe O’Connell, Liberal Democrat Cambridge City Council cabinet member

There are now nine established Combined Authorities, six of which have directly-elected metro mayors. They are the decision-making structures of devolution, and function similarly to a cabinet where the region has a metro mayor. Significant decisions have to be approved by them, and they function as a check on the power of the mayor.

The structure of Combined Authorities differs significantly across the nine in operation. Each has constituent councils, which are the main local authority areas which the Combined Authority has power over. Many also have non-constituent members, which include both Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and other nearby councils who have an interest in governing the powers the authority holds.

The constitutions of some Combined Authorities require the constituent authorities each send one of their elected councillors to sit on the board; in some (like the West Midlands)⁸² they require two councillors from the constituent authorities to , with non-constituent members sending only one. In Sheffield the constituent authorities send one each, with a rotating additional member.

We refreshed our analysis of the announced Combined Authority members at the end of June. As Table 3 shows, women’s representation across all nine combined authorities is low. Only 12% of all people taking a seat at the top table are women, and the same applies to those with automatic voting rights. The position is even worse in areas with the new all-male metro mayors.

81 Women’s Equality Now Wales, ‘The Position in Wales Today on Devolution’, 2015.

82 The West Midlands Combined Authority Order 2016

Table 3: Women in Combined Authority Roles⁸³

Combined Authority (M=Metro Mayor)	Members	Women members	% women	Constituent members	Constituent women members	% women
West Midlands (M)	30	1	3%	15	0	0%
Greater Manchester (M)	11	1	9%	11	1	9%
Liverpool City Region (M)	8	0	0%	7	0	0%
North East	8	1	13%	7	1	14%
Sheffield City Region	11	4	36%	6	2	33%
Tees Valley (M)	7	1	14%	6	1	17%
West Yorkshire	10	3	30%	8	3	38%
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (M)	9	0	0%	8	0	0%
West of England (M)	4	0	0%	4	0	0%
All Combined Authorities total	98	11	11%	72	8	11%
Mayoral Combined Authorities total	69	3	4%	51	2	4%

Women's representation in terms of formal Combined Authority membership is low in Greater Manchester, but the new mayor, Andy Burnham, has taken significant steps to meet his manifesto commitment of a 'gender-balanced Combined Authority'.⁸⁴ The authority's new constitution makes provision for 'Assistant Portfolio Holders', who while not being voting members have attendance and speaking rights at meetings, including where the public are excluded. Mr Burnham has also appointed Baroness Beverley Hughes as the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime – this role is not a Combined Authority member but rather an officer of the authority, but it does have significant power.

We welcome these positive steps, but still believe that it is important to formalise these roles with a vote, as well as a voice, to solidify the influence of women at the top table and put the women on an equal footing with the men.

Reports suggest that other attempts to rectify the under-representation of women by co-opting them have been rebuffed, suggesting that the political balance of power between metro mayors and the combined authorities makes bringing more women in difficult without government intervention.⁸⁵

The variety of different governance arrangements in place across different Combined Authorities points to a structural change that could challenge this dire picture. The legislative orders could be brought in to line so that all constituent authorities appoint two elected councillor members – and one of these members could be required to be a woman. Until this change can be made, metro mayors should agree gender balanced representation with local authorities, in particular where more than one representative is sent, or along the model that Greater Manchester has adopted.

83 Combined authority roles are defined as per authorities' formal constitutions. 'Members' includes Mayors, Deputy Mayors, constituent council members, non-constituent council members, and LEP members. 'Constituent members' includes only Mayors, Deputy Mayors, and constituent council members. Greater Manchester's Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime is not a formal Combined Authority member and therefore is not included, although it is clearly a vital role.

84 GMCA press release, 30th June 2017, 'Equality action as mayor delivers on gender pledge' https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/article/160/equality_action_as_mayor_delivers_on_gender_pledge

85 <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/devolution/2017/05/new-liverpool-metro-mayor-steve-rotherams-top-team-seven-men-no-women>

Equal representation across combined authorities.

Women should be equally represented at the top table. Where councils send two representatives to Combined Authorities, at least one of them should be a woman. The Secretary of State should amend all Combined Authorities' constitutions so that each constituent authority appoints two members.

Where are women's voices?

"The model is also one that is likely to lead to invisibility for non-white-men in decision making. Lip service will be paid to 'consultation' but there is nobody left in paid work to do the work of being consulted with, when it comes to representing the experience and views of carers, those with disabilities, BME stakeholders, etc."

White British woman who works in a women's community group, 45-54

"Devolution isn't yet costed, and it seems to mean unpaid scrutiny, overview and audit committee roles which may be fine for people who are retired and/or without young children, but could be difficult for working councillors or those with caring roles to take part in."

Ros Jackson, East Lindsey District councillor

The underrepresentation of women in devolution has not gone unnoticed. In Greater Manchester, DivaManc started as a response to the image of George Osborne signing off a deal with a room full of white men, and has developed into a grassroots network of women discussing the issues that affect them most and campaigning for change. The major parties' metro mayoral candidates all signed up to their manifesto, developed alongside Fawcett, and which forms the basis of the recommendations in this section.⁸⁶

That grassroots engagement needs to be built on, and the diversity of women's voices in the other devolution regions needs to be heard. The new mayors need to put in place a model that enables women and other marginalised groups to participate in democracy.

We recommend that, as a start, each new combined authority ensures that it has a Women and Equalities Committee, modelled on the parliamentary select committee. A Combined Authority member women and equalities portfolio holder – only Greater Manchester currently has one – should sit on the committee in order to ensure top-level buy-in. This committee will need to work with civil society to develop methods for engaging with the grassroots to co-design policy.

The question of where women's voices are in devolution deals bears directly on to the powers that are to be devolved as part of those deals. At present, the all nine of the Combined Authority devolution deals focus on further education and skills, transport, business support, and employment support – areas which our data on cabinet roles elsewhere in this report shows are viewed through a gendered lens in local government. Land and housing are the priority areas for most deals. Public services like health and social care and children's services, areas where greater numbers of users and workers are women, are only included at an advanced stage in the Greater Manchester plans.⁸⁷

At present Combined Authorities do not provide additional Special Responsibility Allowances to councillors for their participation in the additional layer of democracy. This is likely to be in response to concerns around the additional cost. However, if this decision results in participation being restricted to only those councillors who can afford it, democracy will be diminished. The Government should reconsider whether additional funding can be released to ensure this work is accessible to all.

⁸⁶ <http://www.divamanc.org>

⁸⁷ House of Commons Library, 'Devolution to local government in England', November 2016, <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN07029>

Women and equalities committees in combined authorities

Combined Authorities should establish Women and Equalities Committees, chaired by a cabinet portfolio holder, which will develop locally appropriate mechanisms for engaging with civil society and ensuring a diverse range of women's voices are heard.

Equality impact assessments used to inform decision-making

Combined Authorities must ensure that relevant decisions include a full, published equality impact assessment at an early stage, with a genuine opportunity for that assessment to feed in to decision making.

CONCLUSION

Local government is changing radically, both because local authorities have to re-think how they deliver services with less central government funding and because decision-making is being devolved down to new regional governments. What happens at local level is more significant now than ever before.

Yet our Commission has found that in many ways local government is stuck in the past. An outdated sexist culture that belongs in the 1970s dominates too many of our town halls. Widespread sexist practices, sexual harassment unchecked and unchallenged; a resistance to using technology or changing meeting practices; a lack of inclusive practices and a shockingly widespread failure to meet the basic requirements of having maternity provision, or to provide childcare expenses; these things reveal that local government is still, overwhelmingly, a man-made male-dominated world.

Where we see women break through they make a difference. Where they get elected they are pleasantly surprised by the impact they can have. We also repeatedly found that the motivations for women to become councillors in the first place, and what sustains them, is their willingness to help their local community, to improve people's lives. And we found a readiness amongst women from all political parties to generously share their experiences so that we can try to make things better. We have been repeatedly impressed and inspired by the women that we have met through this Commission and we dedicate this report to them as a tribute to the work that they do for their local communities which is often unrecognised and undervalued.

The recommendations we make in this report would, if implemented, begin to ensure that local government works for women. Given that women overwhelmingly rely on council services and day-in day-out, deliver those services, it really is about time that it did.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Women's representation in 2017 Council Elections

Type	Council name	Total	Women	% Women
County	Buckinghamshire	49	15	31%
County	Cambridgeshire	61	23	38%
County	Cumbria	84	19	23%
County	Derbyshire	64	19	30%
County	Devon	60	18	30%
County	Dorset	46	18	39%
County	East Sussex	50	7	14%
County	Essex	75	19	25%
County	Gloucestershire	53	10	19%
County	Hampshire	78	18	23%
County	Hertfordshire	78	24	31%
County	Kent	81	21	26%
County	Lancashire	84	27	32%
County	Leicestershire	55	15	27%
County	Lincolnshire	70	19	27%
County	Norfolk	84	21	25%
County	North Yorkshire	72	19	26%
County	Northamptonshire	57	17	30%
County	Nottinghamshire	66	17	26%
County	Oxfordshire	63	28	44%
County	Somerset	55	15	27%
County	Staffordshire	62	16	26%
County	Suffolk	75	22	29%
County	Surrey	81	29	36%
County	Warwickshire	57	17	30%
County	West Sussex	70	23	33%
County	Worcestershire	57	15	26%
Unitary	Cornwall	122	32	26%
Unitary	Durham	126	52	41%
Unitary	Isle of Wight	40	7	18%
Unitary	Isles of Scilly	16	3	19%
Unitary	Northumberland	67	20	30%
Unitary	Shropshire	74	17	23%
Unitary	Wiltshire	98	22	22%
Metropolitan	Doncaster	55	17	31%

Type	Council name	Total	Women	% Women
Wales	Blaenau Gwent	42	6	14%
Wales	Bridgend	54	17	31%
Wales	Caerphilly	73	21	29%
Wales	Cardiff	75	25	33%
Wales	Carmarthenshire	74	25	34%
Wales	Ceredigion	42	5	12%
Wales	Conwy	59	13	22%
Wales	Denbighshire	47	10	21%
Wales	Flintshire	70	18	26%
Wales	Gwynedd	75	17	23%
Wales	Merthyr Tydfil	30	5	17%
Wales	Monmouthshire	43	16	37%
Wales	Neath & Port Talbot	64	21	33%
Wales	Newport	50	9	18%
Wales	Pembrokeshire	60	8	13%
Wales	Powys	72	23	32%
Wales	Rhondda/Cynon/Taff	75	32	43%
Wales	Swansea	72	31	43%
Wales	Torfaen	44	16	36%
Wales	Vale of Glamorgan	47	17	36%
Wales	Wrexham	52	10	19%
Wales	Isle of Anglesey	30	3	10%

Appendix 2: Council Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Parental Leave requests

The text of our FOI request is below:

I would like to make a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 for the following information:

Does the council have a formal maternity, paternity, parental and/or adoption leave policy for all councillors? If so, please provide a copy of that policy.

If the council does not have a formal maternity, paternity, parental and/or adoption leave policy for all councillors, does the council have any other means by which it would make provision for a councillor who had recently given birth or become a carer for a child?

Does the council have a formal maternity, paternity, parental and/or adoption leave policy for councillors who are entitled to a Special Responsibility Allowance? If so, please provide a copy of that policy.

If the council does not have a formal maternity, paternity, parental and/or adoption leave policy for councillors who are entitled to a Special Responsibility Allowance, does the council have any other means by which it would make provision for a such a councillor who had recently given birth or become a carer for a child?

Appendix 3: Women Council Leaders Interviewed

The women council leaders interviewed in-depth, selected as a cross-section by party, location and council type, were:

- Cllr Donna Jones**, Portsmouth Council, Conservative
- Cllr Claire Kober**, Haringey Council, Labour
- Dorothy Thornhill**, Directly Elected Mayor of Watford, Liberal Democrat
- Cllr Ellen ap Gwyn**, Ceredigion Council, Plaid Cymru
- Cllr Ruth Dombey**, Sutton Council, Liberal Democrat
- Cllr Sue Jeffrey**, Redcar and Cleveland, Labour
- Cllr Izzie Seccombe**, Warwickshire Council, Conservative
- Cllr Louise McKinley**, Brentwood Council, Conservative
- Cllr Jennifer Mein**, Lancashire Council, Labour
- Cllr Saima Ashraf**, Barking and Dagenham, Labour (Deputy)
- Cllr Syeda Khatun**, Sandwell Council, Labour (Deputy)
- Cllr Sabia Hussain**, Slough Council, Labour (Deputy)

Appendix 4: Cabinet Portfolios by Gender

England

	Overall holders	Women holders	%	Ratio of men to women
Health/ Social Care	151	75	50%	1:1
Culture/ Leisure	122	65	53%	1:1
Housing	182	67	37%	2:1
Environment/ Sustainability	205	59	29%	2:1
Education	54	25	46%	1:1
Corporate/ Transformation/ Policy	219	43	20%	4:1
Business/ Economic Development	181	25	14%	6:1
Planning/ Regeneration	232	47	20%	4:1
Transport/ Highways	74	8	11%	8:1
Community/ Neighbourhood Services	177	80	45%	1:1
Community Safety/ Crime	80	24	30%	2:1
Adults/ Adult Social Care	105	49	47%	1:1
Children/ Children's Social Care	127	69	54%	1:1
Equalities	12	7	58%	1:1
Customer Services/ Comms	64	29	45%	1:1
Finance/ Resources	238	33	14%	6:1
Legal/ Governance	31	11	35%	2:1
ICT	4	1	25%	3:1

Wales

	Overall holders	Women holders	%	Ratio of men to women
Health/ Social Care	6	2	33%	2:1
Culture/ Leisure	6	1	17%	5:1
Housing	11	5	45%	1:1
Environment/ Sustainability	15	4	27%	3:1
Education	20	10	50%	1:1
Corporate/ Transformation/ Policy	23	6	26%	3:1
Regeneration/ Economic Development / Planning	27	2	7%	13:1
Transport/ Highways	4	0	0%	4:0
Community/ Neighbourhood services	14	1	7%	13:1
Community safety/ Crime	3	1	33%	2:1
Adults/Adult Social Care	16	5	31%	2:1
Children/Children's Social Care	17	9	53%	1:1
Customer Services/ Comms	2	0	0%	2:0
Finance/Resources	19	2	11%	9:1
Legal/ Governance	5	2	40%	2:1

Appendix 5: Speakers at the commission's evidence sessions

Birmingham – Getting women in

Cllr Claire-Louise Leyland, Leader of Camden Council Conservative group

Sarah Cope, Green Party Spokesperson for Women

Shaista Gohir, Chair of Muslim Women's Network

Cllr Brigid Jones, Labour Cabinet Member for Children Schools and Families – Birmingham City Council

Beverley Nielsen, Former Liberal Democrat Councillor and Metropolitan Mayoral Candidate

London – Staying and progressing

Cllr Kay Twitchen OBE, Conservative Deputy Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Libraries, Planning and the Environment on Essex County Council.

Zoe Franklin, former Liberal Democrat councillor and PPC for Guildford

Tulip Siddiq MP, Labour MP for Hampstead and Kilburn and former Camden Councillor

Dr Karin Bottom, Lecturer in British Politics and Public Policy at INLOGOV

Manchester – Devolution

Donna Hall CBE, Chief Executive of Wigan Council

Cllr Laura Evans, Trafford Council Cabinet Member for Transformation and Resources

Prof. Francesca Gains, Professor of Public Policy at the University of Manchester

Baroness Anita Gale, Labour frontbench spokesperson on Wales and Equalities

Cllr Hibaq Jama, Labour member for Lawrence Hill, Bristol City Council

London – Officers

Becky Shaw, Chief Executive of East Sussex County Council

Cllr Saima Ashraf, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Heather Wakefield, Head of Local Government, Police, and Justice at UNISON

Sara Blake, Head of Localities and Partnerships, Suffolk County Council

Cardiff – Wales

Mair Rigby, Director of WEN Wales

Cllr Rosemarie Harris, Independent Leader of Powys County Council

Natasha Hirst, Policy and Programmes Manager at Disability Wales

Cllr Heledd Fychan, Plaid Cymru Councillor on Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council

Interim report briefing

Baroness Thornhill MBE, Liberal Democrat Mayor of Watford

Cllr Abena Oppong-Asare, Bexley Labour Councillor

Cllr Baroness Scott of Bybrook OBE, Conservative Leader of Wiltshire Council

Cllr Marianne Overton MBE, Independent Lincolnshire County Councillor

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

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The Fawcett Society is the UK's leading campaign for equality between women and men. We trace our roots back to 1866, when Millicent Fawcett began her lifetime's work leading the peaceful campaign for women's votes. Today we remain the most authoritative, independent advocate for women's rights in the UK.

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