

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT</b>
<b>DIRECTORATE:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>CAROLYN WHEATER – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEGAL AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES)</b>

## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1 A number of recent reports have suggested that local government, in common with many other sectors of public and private life, does not give as prominent a role to women as to men. These reports are summarised and highlighted here for members' consideration, with a particular view to determining whether the Council does sufficient to remove any blocks to equal female participation in local democracy.

## 2. Summary of National Position

### 2.1 The Centre for Women & Democracy

The Centre for Women & Democracy produced a report titled *Sex and Power: Who Runs Britain?* (<http://www.countingwomenin.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Sex-and-Power-2013-FINALv2.-pdf.pdf>) which examined the role of women in British public life. The report noted that women constituted 32 percent of councillors, but only 12.3 percent of council leaders in England, 13.3 percent of elected mayors and 14.6 percent of police and crime commissioners.

### 2.2 The report made six recommendations:

- Political parties should take immediate action to increase the number of women candidates at all levels of election with a view to fielding as many women candidates from as wide a variety of backgrounds and communities as possible in winnable seats in 2015. This should include active consideration of positive action measures in selection processes.
- In order to enable everyone concerned to develop a much better understanding of the issues, a monitoring form similar to that used in recruitment for public appointments and applications for funding should be introduced. It would be completed and submitted to returning officers by all candidates together with nomination forms at all levels of election, and the results collated and published annually.
- Government should pilot a new government-wide scheme to increase women's presence, profile and participation in the 2015 general election and beyond. This could be done by drawing together experience from the UK and abroad which could be used to improve both the participation and the candidacy of women of all backgrounds in Britain.
- Government, political parties and others should act to implement the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference Report published in 2010.
- In addition to adopting the proposals for cultural change in public life contained in reports such as the Speaker's Conference, the Councillors'

Commission, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Pathways to Politics, steps should be taken to develop a much wider set of proposals for improving the culture of both politics at all levels and the media coverage of them.

- All organisations – public, private and third sector – should take steps to ensure that, at meetings and events, both women and men appear on platforms as speakers, and editors and broadcasters should also take responsibility for commissioning contributions from both women and men as commentators and experts. Individual citizens should be encouraged to object to men-only platforms, panels and programmes.

### 2.3 Fawcett Society

The women's rights group, the Fawcett Society, has also produced a briefing paper regarding *Sexism and Local Government* (<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Fawcett-Society-Sexism-and-Local-Government.pdf>), which catalogues a number of general challenges and particular incidents faced by women in local government. The report highlights the low proportion of female councillors, evening meetings, low allowances, and political party selection processes as being particular challenges.

## 3. The City of Lincoln Council's position

- 3.1 Following the elections in May 2014, 12 of the Council's 33 councillors are women (36.36%). In 2009, 27.27% of councillors were women, which was in itself an increase from 21.21% in 2004. Based on these figures there appears to be a clear upward trend in the proportion of female councillors over the past 10 years.
- 3.2 However, within the Council's electoral boundaries, women make up 51.6% of the adult population. If the number of councillors elected were proportionate to the overall population, 17 councillors would be female, suggesting that there are currently approximately 30% fewer female councillors than would be expected.
- 3.3 With regard to electoral candidates, in the most recent local elections in May 2014 approximately two-thirds of the candidates were male and one-third were female. 36.36% of councillors elected in 2014 were women, meaning that the eventual return of female councillors was broadly in line with the proportion of female candidates standing.
- 3.4 As such, within Lincoln women are proportionally under represented both as candidates and as councillors. While the selection of candidates is clearly a matter for individuals and political parties, the Council has a duty to ensure that it does all it can to remove obstacles that might dissuade women from standing for election.
- 3.5 In this regard, some possible areas which might particularly affect women's inclination and capacity to undertake work as a councillor in comparison with men are likely to relate to childcare. While there is limited scope for the Council to make any changes which would lessen the overall workload of individual councillors, there is greater potential to make changes to the operation of committee meetings if members were so minded.
- 3.6 The timing of evening meetings can present particular difficulties for parents of school-age children who need to arrange childcare. While the timing of evening

meetings gives greater opportunities for those working during normal business hours, it is less convenient for those who might otherwise be able to attend daytime meetings while their children are at school.

- 3.7 The Council also offers a Childcare and Dependant Carers' Allowance of £5 per hour, which can be claimed for each child or dependant who requires cover while a member undertakes their duties. Because of the relatively low number of councillors at the Council and the high running costs it is not considered cost-effective to implement a crèche for use during meetings or at other times
- 3.8 Consideration could also be given to the number of meetings held during the summer holiday period. A number of other councils, including Lincolnshire County Council, do not normally hold meetings during the summer months. This allows members with children to more easily arrange childcare during the months when children are away from school.
- 3.9 For as long as women in broader society continue to undertake the majority of childcare duties any action undertaken by the Council is likely to have a limited impact. It is to be acknowledged that a councillor's role is often unavoidably time-consuming and so those balancing work and/or childcare are less likely to undertake the additional demands of becoming a councillor. However, any views or ideas members may have to improve the accessibility of elected office to women would be welcomed for discussion.

#### **4. Strategic Priorities**

- 4.1 The Council has a commitment to being a fit for purpose council, which could be construed as a responsibility to ensure that the Council actively seeks to encourage under-represented groups to play an active part in the Council's democratic process.

#### **5. Organisational Impacts**

##### 5.1 Finance

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

##### 5.2 Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

#### **6. Recommendation**

- 6.1 That members consider whether the Council can take any further action to improve the opportunities for the election of female councillors.