

POWER TO THE PEOPLE?

**TACKLING THE GENDER IMBALANCE
IN COMBINED AUTHORITIES &
LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**Clare McNeil, Carys Roberts
and Charlotte Snelling**

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SUMMARY

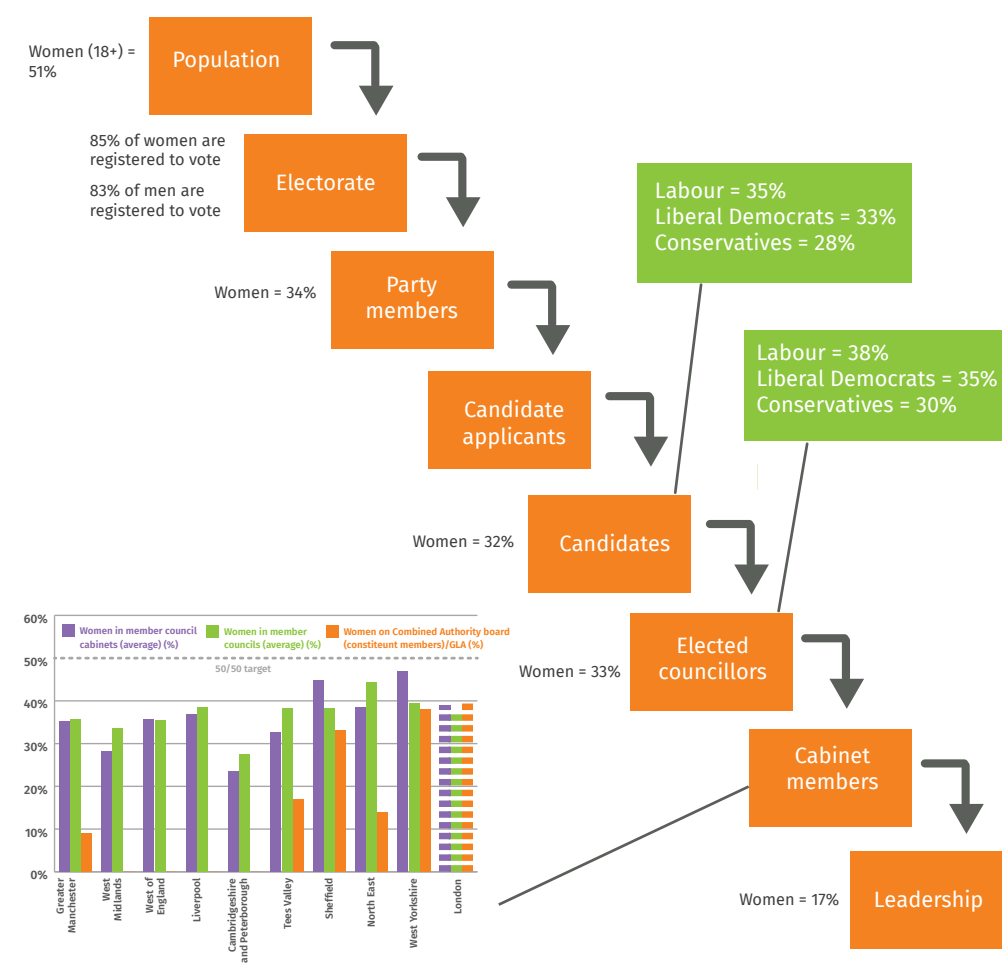
INTRODUCTION

A new generation of young women is ready and willing to participate in politics. The UK general election in June 2017 saw a rise in voter turnout among 18- to 24-year-old women, with participation up from 44 to 53 per cent compared with the 2015 general election. However, so far there is little evidence to suggest that this will translate into higher levels of party membership and political representation among women. Despite making up half of the population and voting in the same numbers as men, on average only 34 per cent of women are a member of a political party, typically the first step into participating into local politics.

This is the first in a 'pattern of thirds', which runs through candidate selection and election, and then thins out dramatically at the top of local government, with women entirely absent among directly elected mayors and representing just 4% of the leadership of England's new devolved institutions – the combined authorities. Figure S1 sets out the different stages in women's representation in the journey towards leadership at the top of local government, showing how, from party membership onwards, it is deeply unequal.

FIGURE S1¹

The stages at which there are barriers to women reaching the top of local government



Source: IPPR analysis using Fieldhouse E, Green J, Evans G, Schmitt H and van der Eijk C, *British Election Study Internet Panel Wave* (Fieldhouse et al 2015); Office for National Statistics, 'Population estimates analysis tool' (ONS 2016); The Electoral Commission, *The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain* (The Electoral Commission 2016); Bazeley A, Glover J, Lucas L, Sloane N and Trenow P, *Does local government work for women? Interim report of the Local Government Commission* (Bazeley et al 2017a); Bazeley A, Glover J, Lucas L, Sloane N and Trenow P, *Does local government work for women? Final report of the Local Government Commission* (Bazeley et al 2017b)

This level of representation of women at the top of institutions which claim to be bringing power closer to the people is unacceptable in 2017. We argue that political parties and institutions must seize the recent increase in voter turnout among young women to dramatically increase the numbers of women going into local politics. This must be complemented by a series of radical reforms to improve the pipeline of women rising to the top in local politics, and to correct the absence of women at the top of combined authorities.

¹ The figure shows how women's representation occurs across England's combined authorities, as well as in Greater London, which, while also representing a collection of local government, is governed by different structures, namely through the directly elected Greater London assembly (partially shaded).

KEY FINDINGS

Women are less likely to become local councillors because they are less likely than men to be political party members.

Women make up just 38 per cent of Labour party members and only 36 per cent of Conservative party members. As a result, fewer women and more men develop the connections and knowledge needed to become a local councillor.

The selection process for councillors by local parties is opaque

While national selection processes are largely formal and determined by party rules, at the local level these can be informal and shaped by networks, environment and culture. Decentralised processes tend to favour well networked and resourced candidates.

Little or no evidence is collected or made public by political parties on the numbers of women coming forward to be selected as a councillor. This makes it impossible to assess how well parties are doing in supporting women to be selected as candidates. Women are less likely to be candidates than men, at 29 per cent (in 2010) and 32 per cent (in 2012) of candidates for metropolitan authorities. This stubborn 'pattern of thirds' continues, with currently only 33 per cent of elected councillors in England being women.

To reach a 50:50 gender balance in local government over 3,000 more women councillors need to be elected

To achieve equal numbers of male and female councillors, 3,028 more women will need to be successfully elected - an increase of over 50%. This means that over 12,000 women need to come forward and apply for council positions, based on previous success rates. In the past 20 years the proportion of women councillors has grown by 5 percentage points: at this rate it will take another 68 years to reach 50: 50 representation.

Combined authority boards are almost entirely composed of men.

In the West Midlands, for example, there are no female councillors in the mayor's cabinet of 15 constituent members (those with voting rights, including mayors, deputy mayors and council members); the same is true for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the Liverpool City Region and the West of England. In total, across the new cabinets of combined authorities that elected mayors in May 2017, there is a 96 per cent male representation rate among constituent members. Across all combined authorities comprising multiple councils, women comprise only 11 per cent of constituent members.

This reflects the fact that women are less likely to be local government leaders. Ahead of local elections in May 2017, only 17 per cent of council leaders were women, amounting to just 56 female leaders, an increase of only two percentage points on 2014/2015.

Women councillors are less likely to have responsibility for key devolution deal policy areas, such as business, finance and regeneration.

Our analysis shows that of the 160 women who are currently cabinet members in councils,² the words business, procurement, jobs, regeneration and finance are unlikely to feature in their portfolios. In contrast, the words health, children, community, social care and wellbeing feature much more heavily. This is a particular issue given that current devolution deals are focussed on the former.

THE CASE FOR REFORM – LESSONS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

What is clear from international comparisons is that where countries have seen a step change in levels of political representation in local or national government, this has come about as a result of decisive political action such as the introduction of equality measures like quotas. More rapid progress is possible under proportional representation electoral systems that allow for practices such as 'alternating lists'. But this can also be achieved under first-past-the-post systems such as in the UK through all women shortlists.

Institutional support from political parties, governments and NGOs in the shape of leadership, mentoring and positive action schemes to encourage women to come forward for political office, have also played a vital role in improving female representation in countries such as Germany, Sweden and in North America. The UK has far less well developed forms of institutional support than in comparison countries, so this is an important area for development.

Evidence from initiatives and policies in other countries suggests some key lessons:

- Political systems based on proportional representation appear, on the whole, to increase opportunities to achieve gender equality.
- It is much easier to create gender-equal systems from scratch, than to try to change them once established.
- Political parties are gatekeepers of power and instrumental in changing access to politics as well as progression within it.
- Non-governmental and governmental institutions can effectively drive and monitor progress.
- Quotas are highly effective in triggering a step change in representation.

The most successful examples of step changes in representation were to be seen in the equality measures introduced by political parties in the devolved assemblies in Scotland and Wales, and local and national parties in Sweden and most recently in France. These changes came about through longstanding pressure from campaigning groups resulting in decisive political action. The lesson is that political leaders have the tools at their disposal to bring about change.

We set out recommendations for achieving more equal representation of women in local government through three key routes: i) increasing the number of women going for selection and election into local government, ii) establishing the institutional support necessary to create a pipeline of women to move into senior positions and, iii) introducing equality measures to reform existing and future combined authority structures to improve their gender balance.

² Specifically, councils that are members of combined authorities, and which operate cabinet governance structures (as opposed to committee structures). Our analysis includes constituent cabinets of the combined authorities for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, the North East, Sheffield City Region, Tees Valley, the West of England, the West Midlands and West Yorkshire. Cornwall is distinct in its combined authority structure, given it comprises only one local authority area. We have included it in this report where possible but it is also excluded where its experience is less comparable.

We focus less on how to achieve improved retention and progression of women in local government, for example through changes in workplace culture and policies, because recommendations for this have been made elsewhere (eg Baseley et al 2017b).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Getting more women into local politics

There needs to be greater clarity from political parties on party membership and the numbers of people coming forward to stand as councillors, particularly women and those from protected groups. This would allow for the performance of parties on recruiting women in equal numbers to men to be understood and assessed. We recommend that:

- **Political parties should be responsible for collecting and publishing data on the representation of women and protected groups in relation to party membership, and the initial recruitment and selection of candidates for local government. Local councils should be responsible for collecting data on elected councillors, which could be achieved by amending section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 to include local government, as recommended by the Fawcett Society.**
- **Rankings of local councils and political parties should be published with this improved data to demonstrate how well they reflect and represent the electorate. These could be based on those published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Germany, where this has been found to encourage learning about what works in different areas.**

Women make up just 38 per cent of Labour party members and only 36 per cent of Conservative party members. As a result, fewer women and more men develop the connections and knowledge needed to become a local councillor. Many factors influencing women to become members will be down to tone and positioning – areas where clear improvements are needed by all political parties.

However, by changing the way they carry out outreach, political parties can improve their chances of recruiting women, for example by finding common cause with campaigning and community groups and reaching out to school sixth forms and universities. Women's groups within political parties can play a key role, but commitment from party leadership is fundamental, as the success of the Conservative party's 'Women2Win' campaign demonstrates.

We find that to reach a 50:50 gender balance in local government, 3028 more women councillors need to be elected (an increase of over 50%) which will require over 12,000 women to come forward in total. We therefore recommend that:

- **Political parties should come together to support a drive to reach a 50:50 gender balance in local government. This would mean encouraging 12,000 more women to come forward for selection as a local councillor, with the overall goal that 3000 are successfully elected. The aim should be to achieve this by 2025. This should be combined with internal reviews of local party processes for attracting and recruiting candidates to ensure they are as transparent, open and fair as possible.**

Getting more women selected, elected and into leadership roles

The '50:50 Parliament' campaign and its 'Ask Her to Stand' initiative aim to recruit more women into national politics. However, there is a gap for a similar cross-party campaign focussed on encouraging women to run for local politics. The most successful international schemes were typically non-politically affiliated, and run as either national networks or individual or networked local chapters with specific local goals for an increase in candidates. We recommend that:

- **To support the goal of encouraging 12,000 more women to come forward for councillor positions by 2025, an ambitious ‘Ask Her to Stand’ initiative for local government should be introduced. This could be coordinated by an existing national pressure group supported by dedicated local groups to pursue local targets.**
- **The Local Government Association's Be a Councillor initiative should be targeted more directly at improving the gender balance in local government.**

This and the measures set out above should, over time, increase the supply of available female candidates. However, given that 80 per cent of councillors elected in any year are reported to be incumbents, radical change is unlikely without further intervention. While the Labour party uses a form of quotas, and correspondingly has a higher number of female councillors than other parties, other parties have weak gender requirements and are lagging behind. Greater use of quotas could dramatically accelerate the representation of women at the local level. We recommend that:

- **If the recommendations above have not resulted in greater representation of women in local government, legislation should be introduced in the next parliament for political parties to apply a quota of 40 per cent for women in posts in local government. Given the UK’s first-past-the-post system, this is most likely to be achieved by parties committing to all-women shortlists in wards and divisions where a councillor is standing down or retiring. Specific measures should also be taken for the most ‘winnable’ seats to ensure the greatest chances of higher female representation. If and when sufficient numbers of women are coming forward, to raise ambitions further this could be increased to 45 or 50 per cent.**

There is also a gap in England for cross-party fast-track empowerment and mentoring programmes for women in local politics such as there are in Germany (the Helene Weber Kolleg scheme and the SPD’s ‘Leadership academy of social democracy’), Canada (Equal Voice) and Northern Ireland (DemocraShe). The labour party has established the Jo Cox Leadership programme³, but there are fewer opportunities for women in other political parties. There is compelling evidence across a range of sectors for the value of mentoring and development schemes in enabling women to rise up into senior positions. In other countries these schemes are often run on a cross-party basis and have ongoing institutional support from government to ensure their continuity and success. We therefore recommend that:

- **The responsibilities of the Minister for Women and Equalities in the UK should include improving the representation of women in both local and national government. As part of this the Minister should work in partnership with political parties to establish a cross-party scheme to provide coaching and mentoring for promising female councillors in England, working in partnership with political parties to set this up. This should be as part of an extended brief to monitor progress towards more equal gender representation in local and national politics in the UK.**

Achieving a better gender balance in the leadership of local authorities and new devolved institutions

The measures above are aimed at improving the pipeline of women councillors into local government and into leadership roles. However while this could be expected to result in changes to the leadership of local authorities and combined authority boards over the next 10-15 years and beyond, more immediate measures will be needed to address the lack of women at the top of these institutions in the short-term.

³ See <http://www.labour.org.uk/pages/the-jo-cox-women-in-leadership-programme>

To reform the structure of combined authorities we recommend that:

- **most mayoral and non-mayoral combined authorities have a deputy chair alongside a chair (mayor or appointed leader) on combined authority boards. In order to ensure a more equal gender balance among the leadership of new and existing combined authorities, the deputy chair role should become a mandatory role for combined authorities and these two top positions should be filled by a man and a woman. The deputy chair role should be nominated from combined authority cabinet members, local authority leaders and local authority cabinet members, and elected by the chair and combined authority members. In Mayoral combined authorities this could also be nominated from the deputy mayor(s).**
- **Where needed to address gender imbalances, this change could be led by Mayors, or the leadership of new and existing combined authorities, and changes could be written into their constitutions. However if this does not happen across the majority of these institutions, legislation should be introduced in the next parliament for this to become a legally required position.**

Where possible these changes should be locally led, by members of local councils, combined authorities and political parties, for change to be as meaningful and sustainable as possible. However where this does not happen there is a case for legislation to be introduced. We therefore recommend that:

- **Both existing and newly constituting combined authority boards should voluntarily sign up to a commitment that no gender should be represented by less than 45 per cent of representatives with full voting rights and membership, to be achieved within eight years. Political parties should sign up to the same commitment for cabinet members and across the leadership of councils.**
- **Combined authority boards need to take into account a range of factors other than gender balance when constituting their boards, including achieving balanced geographical representation. They therefore need a range of options at their disposal for achieving greater gender balance, which is a process that must be locally led if it is to be workable and sustainable.**

We therefore put forward the following options for combined authorities to achieve the 45 per cent commitment:

- appointing female council leaders or, where there are none available, a leader nominating a female representative from their council and giving them delegated authority to represent and take decisions on behalf of their authority – this would be done on a rotating basis until there are enough female leaders that this is no longer necessary
- combined authority members indirectly elected by council leaders and cabinet members with a rotating all-women shortlist, increasing over time to reach 45 per cent
- appointing additional members to ensure that each of the main policy portfolios is represented (portfolios vary significantly around the country, but largely conform to the areas of finance, regeneration and business, health, social care and culture, with health, social care and culture being under-represented on combined authority boards) – these additional members could be drawn from across the constituent local authority cabinet members or senior councillors. This would increase the number of positions that could then be filled by female councillors to increase overall representation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Devolution in England presents a historic opportunity for areas to take control of important policy areas such as economic growth, infrastructure and health. The devolution of power to local and regional levels has the potential to radically reshape England's democracy and improve the way decisions are made for local areas. But current governance models present challenges for representative democracy; specifically, the huge under-representation of women on combined authority boards and in the leadership of councils with agreed devolution deals.

Of the six combined authorities that elected mayors in May 2017, no women were elected, and within these six combined authority cabinets, 96 per cent of constituent members – typically the leaders of the constituent councils and the mayors – are men. This research surveys the international and domestic evidence to present the causes of this lack of female representation, and what strategies can be used now to design in gender equality from the start.

We identify two ways to approach gender representation in combined authorities: looking at pipelines into combined authorities and looking at the structure of the combined authorities. In particular, a focus on combined authorities necessitates an examination of local government, as combined authority boards are predominantly made up of representatives from constituent local authorities.

Local government is often expected to deliver greater female representation than national government, given the geographical proximity between constituencies and wards with the central or main chamber and, in theory, involving little work away from home (Bochel and Bochel 2008, Charles 2014).

Indeed, with women making up 33 per cent of councillors in England today and 29 per cent of Members of Parliament (MPs) in 2015,⁴ this theory has historically borne out (Bazeley et al 2017a), although following the general election in June 2017, women now comprise 32 per cent of all MPs. However, in terms of councillors, 33 per cent is far below the 50 per cent of the population who are women. The picture in the devolved nations is worse: women represent 29 per cent of councillors in Scotland and 28 per cent in Wales, following elections in May 2017. And when it comes to local leadership, just 17 per cent of local authority leaders in England are women (Bazeley et al 2017b).

The UK's experience is mirrored across the European Union where, on average, women account for 32 per cent of regional assembly members and local councillors, a figure that has only shifted by two percentage points in two years (European Commission 2013).

Local government should be a key talent pipeline for combined authorities (and national government). For this to happen, it is vital that local government – often the entry point into politics – becomes more gender balanced so as to maximise the number of women progressing upwards.

⁴ Of the MPs elected in the 2015 general election, 29 per cent were women. The proportion increased to 30 per cent following by-elections.

A lack of women at any level of government results in a democratic deficit, including at the local and combined authority levels. Local government, and the new combined authorities – composed of local authorities, which are as standard represented by their leaders – make hugely important decisions about policies that affect women as much as men. Combined authorities will have power over investment in further education courses, in transport links between different areas and in housing, and will set the economic strategy for their area. Some have tax-raising powers and responsibility for National Health Service budgets.

Many local government policy areas have a much greater impact on women than on men. For example, local government has oversight of childcare provision as well as responsibility for delivering and funding social care. Women, who in 2017 still shoulder the greatest burden of caring responsibilities in the family, are simply more affected by decisions on who gets state-funded care, and how it is delivered. Women need proper, legitimate representation for their voices to be heard, and for the services that affect them disproportionately to be as highly prioritised as other areas. For example, ‘the northern powerhouse’ may need rail links, broadband and roads to succeed, but it will also require ‘social infrastructure’, such as high-quality early-years childcare and services that support families – especially women – with caring responsibilities.

In the UK, as more power is transferred to local and sub-regional levels with the rollout of devolution, there is a real risk that this process will reinforce existing gender inequalities. As new democratic institutions and systems are set up, we must ensure that they promote gender equality rather than restrict it. The evidence we present in this report shows that when women are elected, they do work to actively improve the situation of women in the population.

The UK is far from alone in grappling with the issues under the spotlight here; most countries in the world have political systems and local politics with majority male representation. However, many are making efforts to improve the representation of women. Yet information on what has worked elsewhere and on transferable lessons for the UK is not readily available; this research serves that purpose.

This research complements the work of others – including the Fawcett Society’s Local Government Commission, the Centre for Women and Democracy and the Electoral Reform Society – by looking at national and international approaches to improving women’s representation in local and regional government and by examining the role of political parties as well as local government in this.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There is a lack of evidence on ‘what works’ in improving the representation of women in local and sub-regional politics. This research addresses that gap by looking at how a range of countries perform in terms of women’s representation below the national level, and what initiatives and policies have been pursued to improve this performance. We compare these countries with the UK, and specifically England, to establish what could work in the English context to improve gender representation in local and sub-regional government. Key questions include:

- What are the main barriers to women entering local politics and progressing?
- Why are women not equally represented on combined authority boards, and how can this be changed?
- What initiatives and policies have been used in other countries to improve gender representation at the local level? Have they worked, and could they work in the English context?

To answer these questions, our analysis included interviews with party-political stakeholders from all of the major parties in the UK and independent councillors, including recently elected councillors, cabinet members, and leaders, as well as experts on the topic and key actors in the case study countries, over the period March to May 2017. Our interviews involved talking to women about their experiences of entering local politics and their councillor careers once elected, tracing their progression routes into and out of council positions, and exploring both the barriers and opportunities they had encountered, to gain an insight into where – and what – more proactive interventions are needed.

We have chosen to focus primarily on the nine English combined authorities that comprise of multiple local authorities – Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, Tees Valley, West Midlands, West of England, Sheffield City Region, North East and West Yorkshire. When discussing the case of recently elected mayors (elections were held in May 2017), we refer solely to the first six in this list. The Sheffield City Region will not elect a mayor until 2018, and the North East and West Yorkshire are yet to agree their final mayoral arrangements. We also refer to Cornwall where relevant, and this is highlighted within the text. Cornwall is distinct as a combined authority in that it comprises only one local authority area. Some of the issues affecting its governance structures are therefore not wholly comparable for all elements of our analysis. We have therefore only included it in the report where possible, and reference this in the explanatory text; it is excluded where its experience is less comparable.

Local government and combined authorities in England

In the UK, parliamentary constituencies are represented by MPs at the national level. Beneath this level of government there are the devolved nations: Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, each with their own assembly or parliament with powers over investment, public services, much social policy and in some cases fiscal policy. England, the primary focus of this research, does not have a devolved assembly. Within England, local government varies by region; areas either have authorities that have responsibility for a wider range of local services (55 unitary authorities, 36 metropolitan districts, 33 London boroughs and the council of the Isles of Scilly) or two tiers of local government (27 county councils and 201 district councils within these), where local services are delivered either by a district council or at a wider level by a county council. At the most local level, some areas also have elected town and parish councils with responsibility for very local services.

Since 2000, the Greater London Authority has had shared responsibility for some local services and strategic planning together with London boroughs. London has its own assembly and directly elected mayor – an additional layer of government to local authorities. Sixteen local authorities also have directly elected mayors in place while, more recently, other regions have agreed deals with national government to take on new powers and responsibilities as ‘combined authorities’ and in most cases to introduce combined authority mayors. Combined authorities are led by the political leaders of member local authorities, the mayor if there is one, and representatives from local partners, in particular local enterprise partnerships. Local partners and councils that are members of more than one combined authority would typically be ‘non-constituent’ members, without voting rights. For example, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has existed since 2011, bringing together 10 councils in the area. In May 2017, Greater Manchester elected its first mayor, Andy Burnham, who chairs and sits as the 11th member of the combined authority.

2. THE STATE OF PLAY ON GENDER REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL AND SUB-REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

Whether women are able to access opportunities to represent their areas in combined authorities and positions of leadership within their councils is in part determined by the number of female councillors in the first place from which leaders, representatives and portfolio holders can be drawn.

Progress on gender representation in local government has stalled in the past 20 years and varies widely by local authority and political party.

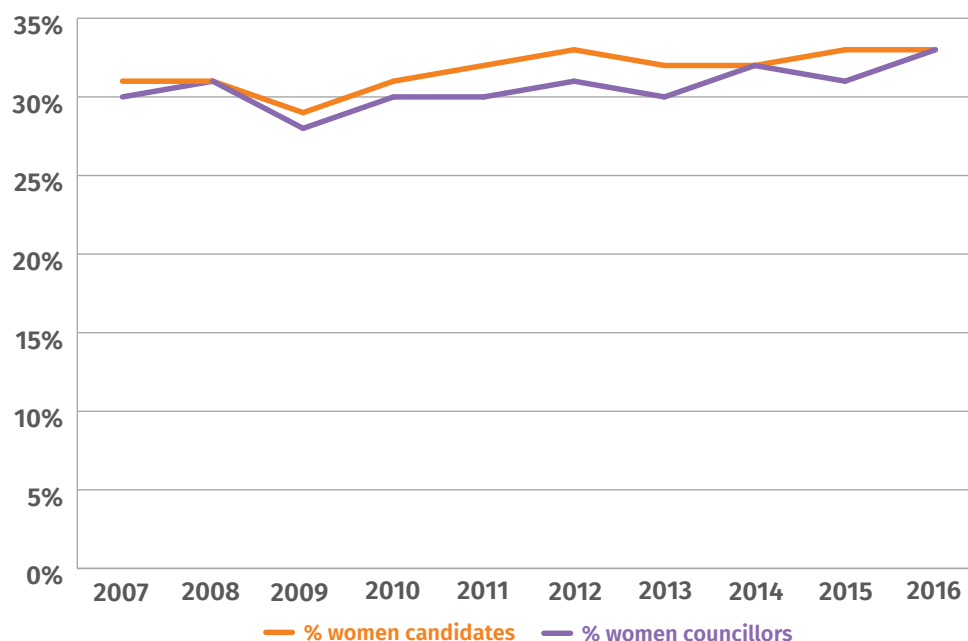
Traditionally, local government has been an arena where women have enjoyed more opportunities to take on political positions, often because of the practicalities of a locally based role versus a national post, and the comparatively shorter working hours when compared with a paid political position – albeit not necessarily at convenient times. Women’s representation in local government was already as high as 28 per cent in 1997 (Bazeley et al 2017a). By way of comparison, despite a landslide Labour victory in the 1997 general election and the first formal use of all-women shortlists, women comprised only 18 per cent of MPs.

However, while local councils in England have historically delivered greater representation for women, this has recently plateaued – at around a third (33 per cent in both 2016 and 2017) (Bazeley et al 2017b). Since 2007, the percentage of candidates who are women (those who are selected by parties to stand in council ward elections or who have been nominated as an independent candidate) has also remained around a third (see figure 2.1). Interestingly, and in contrast, parliament has seen much faster gains in the past two decades. The UK ranks 49th in the world for women’s representation in national legislative elections, with 208 female MPs elected to the House of Commons in June 2017, an increase of 9 per cent on those elected in May 2015.

FIGURE 2.1

The percentage of female candidates and female councillors has flatlined in recent years, at around a third of all candidates and councillors

Female local election candidates and councillors over time in England, as a percentage of all candidates and councillors



Source: Bazeley A, Glover J, Lucas L, Sloane N and Trenow P, *Does local government work for women? Interim report of the Local Government Commission* (Bazeley et al 2017a)

Analysis in 2008 revealed that the level of women’s representation among elected councillors across England’s local authorities can range from as low as 3 per cent to as much as 49 per cent (Bochel and Bochel 2008). Across the constituent councils of the nine combined authorities analysed in this report that have multiple local authority members, the range is from 21 per cent in Huntingdonshire (in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority) to 52 per cent in North Tyneside (North East Combined Authority). It also varies across political parties, with as many as 38 per cent and 37 per cent of Green party and Labour councillors in England (in 2013) being female respectively, but as few as 29 per cent and 11 per cent respectively in the case of Conservative and Ukip councillors (Apostolova and Cracknell 2017).

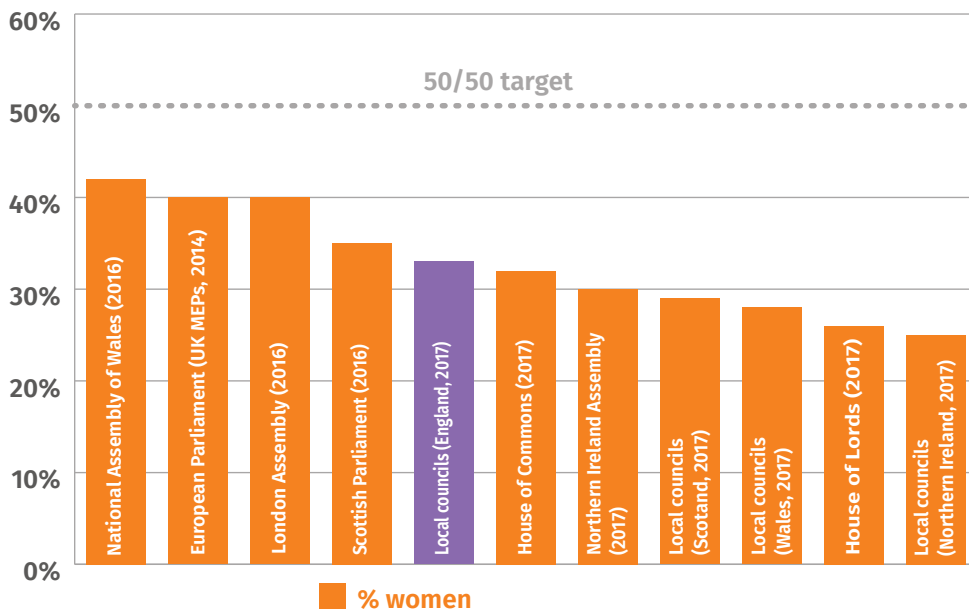
Compared with councils in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, England actually performs best on women’s representation in local politics, but the proportion of women in English councils remains below the proportion in the Welsh, Scottish and London devolved assemblies (see figure 2.2).⁵ As newer political institutions, there has perhaps been a more concerted effort to embed principles of gender equality and awareness into combined authorities from the beginning (Charles 2014). There are therefore opportunities within combined authorities, and yet unless the number of female councillors increases, the number of women able to play a role in these new structures is likely to be low.

⁵ Only Wales elects local councillors through a comparable first-past-the-post electoral system. Scotland and Northern Ireland use the single transferable vote.

FIGURE 2.2

Women comprise around a third of England’s councillors, more than seen in the rest of the UK but less than in the London, Scottish and Welsh devolved assemblies

Women’s representation across the UK’s political institutions



Source: Apostolova V and Cracknell R, *Women in parliament and government* (Apostolova and Cracknell 2017); Bazeley A, Glover J, Lucas L, Sloane N and Trenow P, *Does local government work for women? Interim report of the Local Government Commission* (Bazeley et al 2017a); Bazeley A, Glover J, Lucas L, Sloane N and Trenow P, *Does local government work for women? Final report of the Local Government Commission* (Bazeley et al 2017b); Women 50:50, ‘So here is the data for #LocalElections2017 (with huge thanks to @merylkenny for all the counting and checking!)’ (Women 50:50 2017b)

* MEPs = Members of the European Parliament.

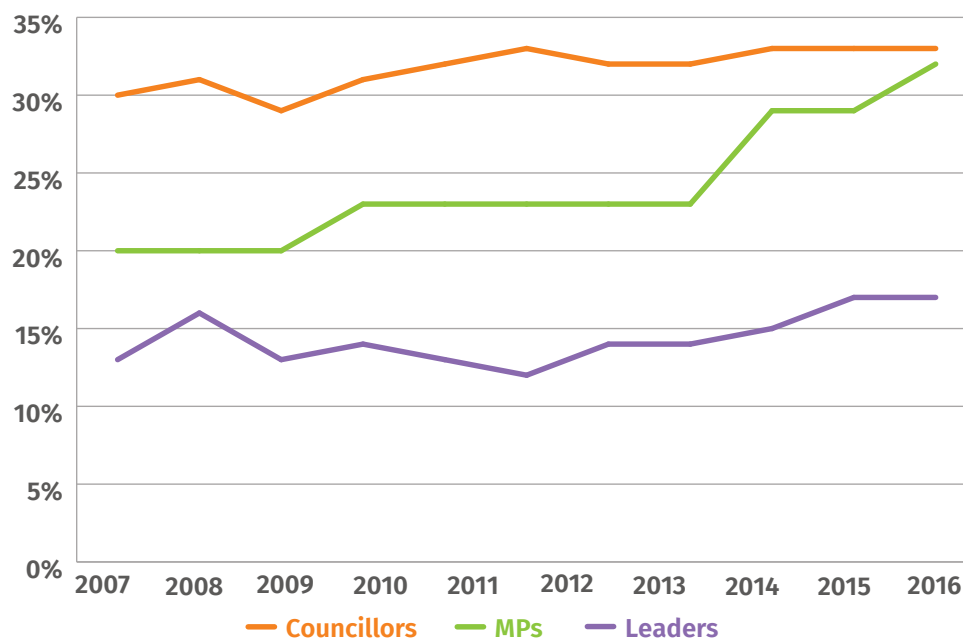
Women are less likely than men to be local government leaders.

Ahead of the local elections in May 2017, only 17 per cent of council leaders were women (see figure 2.3), amounting to just 56 female leaders (Bazeley et al 2017b), an increase of only two percentage points from 2014/2015 (CFWD 2015a). Of the 16 directly elected mayors currently in England and Wales, only four are women (Trenlow and Olchawski 2016). While councillor and MP female representation levels are poor, it is therefore in leadership where women’s opportunities for participation become particularly stark.

FIGURE 2.3

Women’s political representation has plateaued in recent years but it is in council leadership where rates remain lowest

Female leaders, councillors and MPs in England as a percentage of all leaders, councillors and MPs, over time



Source: Bazeley A, Glover J, Lucas L, Sloane N and Trenow P, *Does local government work for women? Interim report of the Local Government Commission (Bazeley et al 2017a)*

Research by Bochel and Bochel (2008) found as few as 11 councils in which both leader and deputy leader were women, while 237 had all-male leadership and 8 per cent all-male cabinets. For the combined authorities electing mayors in May 2017, only two of the 38 constituent councils are led by women. Extending this to Sheffield, the North East and West Yorkshire, which also comprise of multiple councils but are yet to elect or agree mayoral arrangements, the picture improves only marginally, to a total of seven women – although this figure still only represents 13 per cent of the council leaders. Cornwall, limited to some extent by its single-council membership, has only male leadership.

No political party performs particularly strongly across the country, with 19 per cent of Labour council leaders and 15 per cent of Conservative council leaders being women (Bazeley et al 2017a). The Liberal Democrats fare marginally better, at 30 per cent (Bazeley et al 2017a), but the number of councils where Liberal Democrats have overall control remains small at 2 per cent (LGiU no date).

WHAT DO COMBINED AUTHORITIES MEAN FOR WOMEN’S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION?

Given their recent introduction into the regional governance structures of England, there is limited data available to observe issues of gender balance in combined authorities. We can, however, look at the institutions as they currently stand.

Combined authority boards have many more men who are members than women.

Combined authority board members are almost exclusively leaders and deputy leaders of constituent councils. Of the six combined authorities that elected mayors in May 2017, four make explicit reference on their websites to their executive board

or cabinet comprising the leaders of the constituent councils. The same is true of Sheffield City Region Combined Authority, which will elect a mayor in 2018.⁶ Only Tees Valley adopts the language of ‘representatives’, but on closer inspection, the current composition of the board is restricted to its council leaders.

This will have particularly important implications for women’s representation in devolved matters given that we have seen that they occupy lower positions – and fewer positions – than their male counterparts at the local level, on which mayors and their cabinets are expected to focus their interactions. Of England’s regions, only London and Yorkshire and the Humber have more than a fifth of council leaders who are women (Bazeley et al 2017a), and for areas where some combined authorities are based, such as the South West and East of England, it is as little as 11 and 16 per cent respectively (ibid).

Within the constituent councils of the combined authorities that elected mayors in May 2017, as stated above, very few have female leaders.⁷ As few as nine of these councils also have a female deputy leader.⁸ This creates limited opportunities for women to be involved in combined authority cabinet meetings, particularly where it is assumed that leaders should be given priority.

For instance, in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, all its board members – representing both its constituent councils and the local enterprise partnership (LEP) – are men. In addition, only one of seven council members has nominated a woman as a substitute member for when the leader is unable to attend.⁹ In the West Midlands, there are no female councillors in the mayor’s constituent members’ cabinet, and the same is true for the West of England, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and the Liverpool City Region. In total, across the new cabinets in those combined authorities that recently elected mayors, there is a 96 per cent male representation rate. That is to say, only 4 per cent of cabinet members are women.

For all combined authorities comprising multiple constituent councils, there is some improvement but only to women occupying 11 per cent of seats on the board. These figures of 4 and 11 per cent women’s representation continue when extended to consider all members (that is, including those with non-voting rights) (see Bazeley et al 2017b).

Whether local authorities have female leaders, and a pipeline of women who could become leaders, is therefore very important to ensure equal representation of women in combined authorities.

Combined authorities are exclusively led by men.

A combined authority elected mayor is by default the chair of the cabinet or board. In the six mayoral elections in May 2017, no women were elected. The total number of candidates for the mayoral elections was 39 but just 18 per cent of these individuals were women. Only one contest (Liverpool) had more than one woman standing. As few as two of the seven female candidates standing across the contests (in Tees Valley and the West of England) were deemed to have a realistic chance of winning. These women were candidates for leading UK parties in areas with a significant level of party support (Terry 2017).

6 Two more combined authorities (North East Combined Authority and West Yorkshire Combined Authority) have similar structures but are yet to have devolution deals finalised or mayoral leadership arrangements confirmed. Their structures and membership are therefore liable to change.

7 IPPR analysis of council cabinets, 2017 (information accessed via council websites).

8 Although for Fenland District Council, no deputy leader is stated.

9 See Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Annual Meeting, Wednesday 31 May 2017, ‘Index of Supporting Information’.

Across all parties and regions, voters had limited options for electing a woman as their new mayor and for women, in turn, to gain a leading role in shaping the direction of each area's devolution agenda.

LEPs are also represented on combined authority boards, typically as non-constituent members. Although not politically elected and having non-voting rights, the gender balance of LEPs is important as they can provide input into cabinet discussions and influence decisions, particularly on key areas of business, finance and regeneration. Governance structures for the combined authorities vary but frequently it is the LEP chair who will attend cabinet meetings.

Only four of England's 38 LEPs have female chairs (IPPR analysis using LEP Network 2017). Analysis of LEP board membership finds that with boards ranging from eight to 27 members in size, the average number of female members is just three, and women typically comprise only a fifth of any LEP board (19 per cent). Even when a combined authority includes all members of its LEP board as associate members in its cabinet meetings, such as Tees Valley, only a small proportion of these non-council members are women (two out of 11 in the case of Tees Valley). It therefore does little to overcome the cabinet's unequal gender representation.

Female councillors are less likely to have responsibility for key devolution deal policy areas, such as business, finance and regeneration, than male councillors.

The devolution deals in England have been framed as predominantly economic in their focus, with language such as 'the northern powerhouse' evoking images of industrial strategy, infrastructure planning and economic growth. As the Public Accounts Committee has concluded, other areas – such as housing, education and skills – have received less attention (House of Commons' Committee of Public Accounts 2016). This has significant implications for gender.

As in national politics (Allen 2012), previous research has found that female councillors are more likely than male councillors to hold portfolios for 'caring' policy areas, for example social services, housing and health (Bochel and Bochel 2008). They are less likely to work on corporate affairs, regeneration, economic development and transport. Even where in absolute numbers women might enjoy some representation, the substantive representation of women's voices on a range of issues remains marginal. This not only reinforces traditional gender roles but also means fewer opportunities to build up experience, expertise and confidence on policy areas that, so far, have dominated much of the city and regional devolution discussions. Therefore where combined authority cabinets and mayors are minded to invite wider councillor expertise into decision-making, there is likely to be a skew towards men who hold relevant portfolio positions.

The division of portfolios can also create a further disadvantage for women, highlighted by one interviewee who commented that without taking on a cabinet role with financial or economic components, women's likelihood of assuming a position of leadership will always be much lower. Women's absence from particular positions may therefore preclude their ability to move into leadership positions in the future.

It is not easy to compare cabinet portfolios across councils since each has its own traditions, the area its own priorities, and the leader and leading party their own preferences. This is reflected in a wide range of cabinet roles existing across the country, with no one council having the same cabinet composition as another. There are different numbers of cabinet members and different portfolios, with the issue areas framed and grouped in a variety of ways. For instance, in Manchester City Council there is both a schools portfolio and a children services portfolio, whereas in Bolton these are combined within an education, schools, safeguarding and looked-after children role. Issues also arise from the low number of women

in cabinets altogether, which means that men may often still take on roles traditionally associated with women.

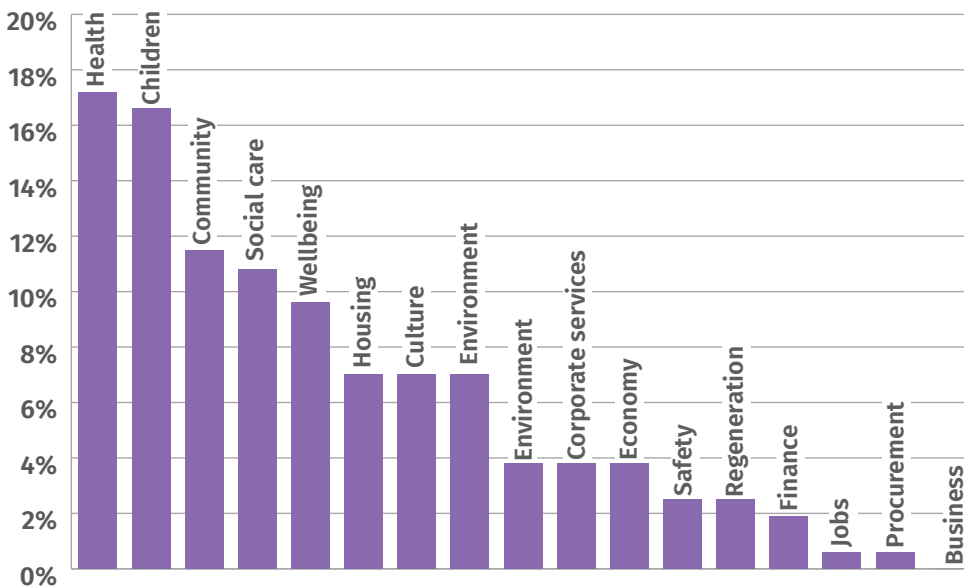
To examine the extent to which women are currently accessing cabinet positions in traditionally male-dominated domains, such as finance, business, procurement, policing and regeneration, compared against their likelihood of having responsibility for more female-associated areas, such as social care, education and safeguarding, we have looked at the cabinet positions held by the 160 women currently in constituent cabinets of all combined authorities.

Given variation in how policy areas are grouped, we have analysed the frequency with which particular words feature in women’s portfolios (see figure 2.4).¹⁰ Notably, the words business, procurement, jobs, regeneration and finance are unlikely to feature in the portfolio of a female council cabinet member. In contrast, and as anticipated, the words health, children, community, social care and wellbeing feature much more heavily.

FIGURE 2.4

Female councillors’ portfolios are more likely to feature responsibility for issues of health, children, community and social care than they are for issues of finance, regeneration and business

Frequency of words in the portfolios of female council cabinet members across England’s combined authorities



Source: IPPR analysis of female councillors’ portfolios

Some members of LEP boards are elected councillors, which might provide some scope for female councillors to take on more economics-based responsibilities, even if they do not gain this through a cabinet position. However, there is significant under-representation of female councillors on these boards, with an average of just one female councillor on any LEP board. Nineteen LEPs have none.¹¹

¹⁰ To minimise the risk of researcher effects, only cases where the word itself features were counted.

¹¹ Only Sheffield City Region LEP includes more than two female councillors on its board but at just three this is still only a third of the total councillor representation.

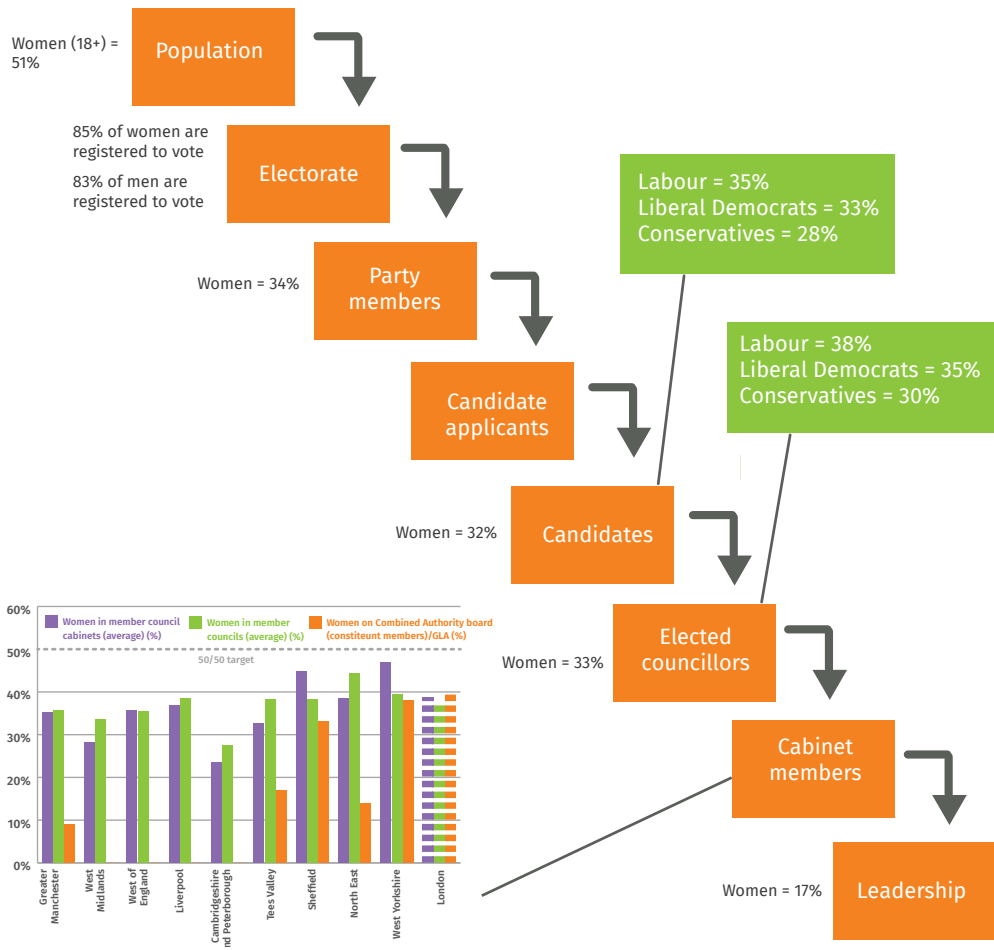
Even where women are able to access positions of power within the combined authorities, for example through taking up cabinet positions, their portfolios and areas of responsibility are not necessarily the highest profile. In Greater Manchester, its female cabinet member has responsibility for fairness, equalities and cohesion, while positions on the economy, environment and digital have been allocated to men. Interestingly, however, in the same combined authority, the deputy mayor for policing and crime is a woman – albeit not a councillor – which is a more notable move away from traditional gendered positions.

THE POLITICAL JOURNEY TO COMBINED AUTHORITY BOARDS

In the context of England's new combined authority structures, we have identified a number of stages in women's representation in the journey towards leadership at the top of local government. Figure 2.5 sets out these stages, showing how, from party membership onwards, the balance between men and women's representation is deeply unequal and has the potential to shift.

FIGURE 2.5¹²

The journey to women’s representation at the top of local government



Source: IPPR analysis using Fieldhouse E, Green J, Evans G, Schmitt H and van der Eijk C, *British Election Study Internet Panel Wave* (Fieldhouse et al 2015); Office for National Statistics, ‘Population estimates analysis tool’ (ONS 2016); The Electoral Commission, *The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain* (The Electoral Commission 2016); Bazeley A, Glover J, Lucas L, Sloane N and Trenow P, *Does local government work for women? Interim report of the Local Government Commission* (Bazeley et al 2017a); Bazeley A, Glover J, Lucas L, Sloane N and Trenow P, *Does local government work for women? Final report of the Local Government Commission* (Bazeley et al 2017b)

At stage 1, there is an almost equal 50:50 ratio in England’s population aged 18+ (calculated via ONS 2016). Similarly, in the electorate (stage 2), estimates suggest that women and men have a roughly equal chance of being on the electoral register – women at a rate of 85 per cent, men at a rate of 83 per cent (The Electoral Commission 2016) – which implies that women are not more disengaged from the idea of formal political participation than men.

Wider research goes on to suggest that women are only marginally less interested in politics compared with the national average (49 per cent versus 53 per cent), and no less likely to be political participants (Hansard Society 2017). The potential pool of women to engage in politics is therefore similar in size to that of their

12 The figure shows how women’s representation occurs across England’s combined authorities, as well as in Greater London, which, while also representing a collection of local authorities, is governed by different structures, namely through the directly elected Greater London assembly (partially shaded).

male counterparts. The 2017 general election saw a rise in electoral participation, particularly among young women, with 18- to 24-year-old women increasing their turnout from the 2015 general election, from 44 per cent to 53 per cent (Ipsos MORI 2015, 2017). There is therefore also a cohort of young women ready and willing to participate in politics, more so than has been seen in recent history.¹³

However, it is after this point that the balance starts to move disproportionately in favour of men. Party membership figures (stage 3) are often difficult to estimate in the absence of consistent recording and publishing of membership by parties. Estimates suggest that overall membership remains low; despite rising in recent years, only 1.6 per cent of the electorate is thought to be a party member (Keen and Audickas 2016). This necessarily limits the pool of potential candidates for council elections since the majority of councillors are party members and, crucially, women are less likely to be party members than men.

It has previously been approximated that women comprise only 33 per cent of party members in the UK (Whiteley 2009), and more recently 35 per cent, in 2015 (Bale et al 2016). Whiteley (2009) goes on to claim that this is the most prominent discrepancy between party membership and electorate characteristics, when compared against other social indicators.

Using data from the British Election Study from May 2015,¹⁴ IPPR analysis finds that this does not appear to have shifted significantly. Of respondents answering that they were currently paid-up party members,¹⁵ 66 per cent were men, and of those who reported that they had previously been party members,¹⁶ 61 per cent were men. Men within the same survey sample were also 10 percentage points more likely to be or have been a party member; 77 per cent of male respondents versus 87 per cent of female respondents claimed to have never been a party member.

An examination of party preferences finds that Labour is the most popular party for membership among both men and women, with approximately two-fifths of former or current party members in the British Election Study sample being members of Labour (41 per cent for both male and female respondents). For the Conservatives, male party members had a 24 per cent chance of being a member, versus 23 per cent for female party members.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the inequality in membership overall means that in no major party do women enjoy equal representation. According to this sample, they are anticipated to comprise 38 per cent of Labour members and only 36 per cent of Conservative members.

Further analysis using the British Election Study finds that 69 per cent of men report either strong or very strong party identification, versus 62 per cent of women.¹⁸ Given that the vast majority of local councillors are affiliated to political parties, this presents a significant barrier to getting women to put themselves forward for councillor positions. It limits both the likely encouragement received among women's social networks (if they are not engaging regularly with political parties) and the level of knowledge about what councillors do and how they get elected. It also suggests that parties could be doing much more to harness the political interest of (particularly young) women who are now entering the

13 Comparative figures for men aged 18–24 years show an increase from 42 per cent to 54 per cent, suggesting that young women are not significantly less likely to be participating in elections than their male counterparts.

14 Post-election wave 6 of the 2014–2018 British Election Study Internet Panel (Fieldhouse et al 2015) (recommended core weight applied to all analysis).

15 N = 2,464.

16 N = 2,746.

17 Based on a combined sample of past and current party members.

18 IPPR analysis using the British Election Study Data Playground, 'Strength of party identification vs gender'. <http://www.britishelectionstudy.com/data/#.WS6Qu-vyvcs>

electorate. The boost in voter turnout for the 2017 general election was certainly a positive sign, but parties should not rest on their laurels.

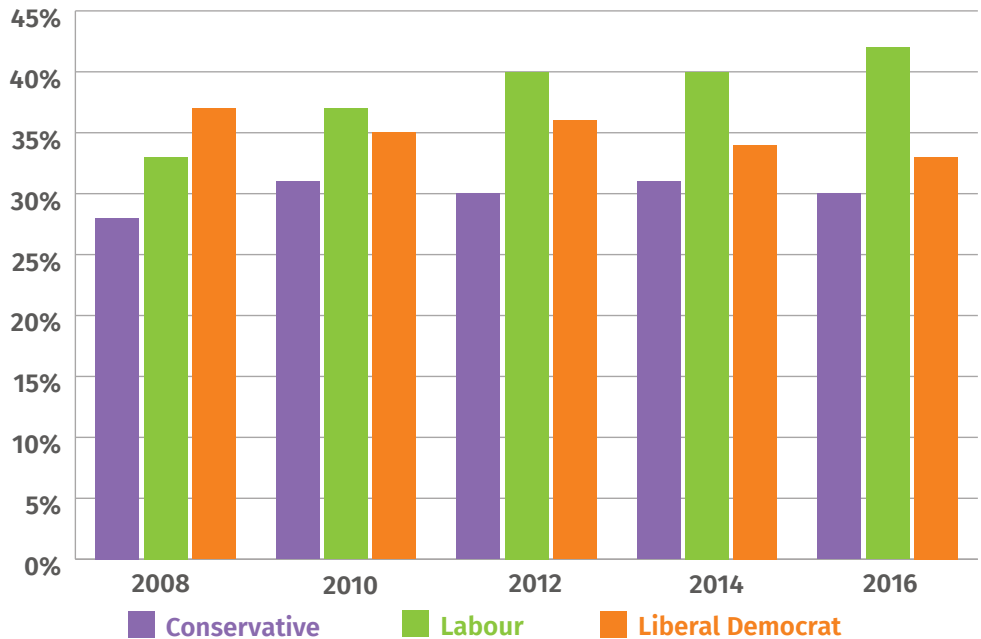
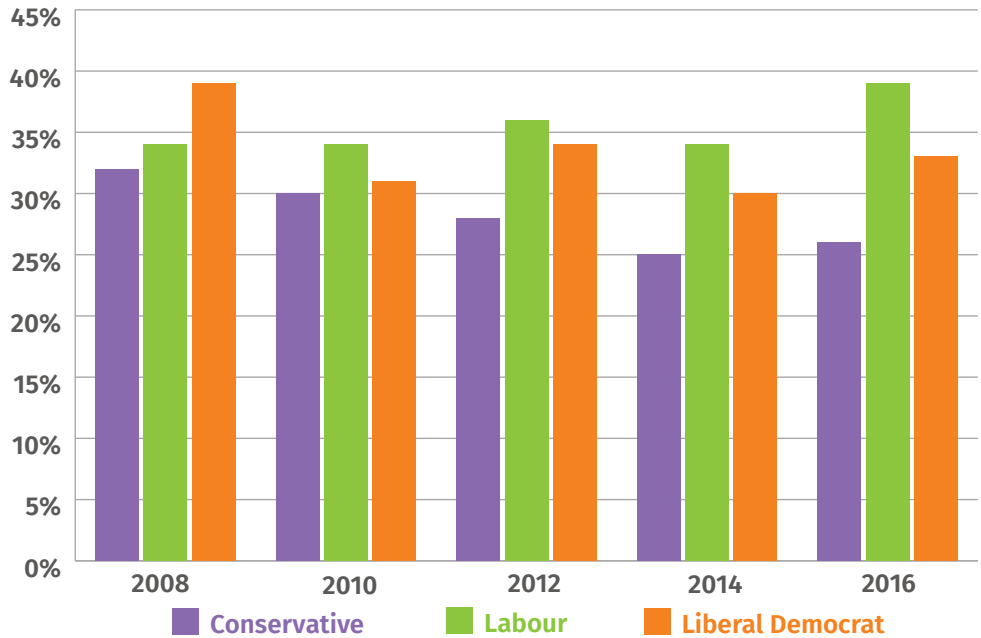
Little data is available on the number of women who are party members and who put themselves forward for election (stage 4). There is no standardised monitoring or public reporting of this, and data is held by local party agents, and so it cannot be easily accessed. Nevertheless, our interviews with female councillors across different parties, as well as independents, have suggested that frequently women are motivated into politics not by party membership but by local single-issue campaigns, which then prompt their application for selection. We return to this in chapter 3.

Once women become politically engaged to the extent of putting themselves forward for election, the next stage is to be selected (stage 5). Women, however, are less likely to be party candidates in local elections than their male counterparts. In metropolitan authorities, over the period 2006–2012, women comprised only between 29 per cent (in 2010) and 32 per cent (in 2012) of candidates (CFWD 2014). As figure 2.5 shows, even where party selection rules apply – for example, Labour’s use of quotas in multi-member wards – women continue to be under-represented as both candidates and councillors in England. Since 2008, women have never comprised half, let alone more than half, of any party’s candidates.

FIGURE 2.6

Women consistently make up less than half of local election candidates and local councillors, across England's major political parties

Female candidates for local elections in England over time by political party (% of candidates) (top) and female councillors in England over time by political party (% of councillors) (bottom)



Source: Bazeley A, Glover J, Lucas L, Sloane N and Trenow P, *Does local government work for women? Interim report of the Local Government Commission (Bazeley et al 2017a)*

This 'pattern of thirds' continues into elections (stage 6), with only 33 per cent of elected councillors in England being women (Bazeley et al 2017a). As a result, in numerical terms there are fewer women who can be considered when allocating leadership and cabinet positions. For example, the average proportion of female

cabinet members (stage 7) for the combined authorities assessed here, which comprise multiple councils, ranges between just 24 per cent and 48 per cent.¹⁹ However, for those electing mayors in May 2017, the range is between 24 per cent and 28 per cent, suggesting that those combined authorities yet to elect a mayor or agree mayoral arrangements may have greater potential for embedding principles of gender equality. Where women are likely to be occupying particular portfolios (Bochel and Bochel 2008), the combined authorities' focus on economy, infrastructure and regeneration might further restrict opportunities for women.

Finally, as we have seen, women are less likely than men to be council leaders (stage 8). They also experience fewer opportunities to access positions of leadership where there are elected mayors, as an alternative structure. Mayoral elections over the period 2006–2014 involved between just 15 and 30 per cent female candidates, although in individual contests rates were higher – in 2014, the rate was 50 per cent in Watford and 40 per cent in Hackney (CFWD 2014).

Women are less likely to stay in post for a long time, and less likely to progress into other levels of government, than men.

Research on women re-standing for election is mixed but this is nevertheless crucial in understanding women's position within local and combined authorities. It is through building up experience and profile that we might imagine that women will be more encouraged, within themselves but also from colleagues, to take on more high-profile roles and challenge convention and established party processes.

Female councillors have typically been less likely than male councillors to plan to stand for re-election – in research by Allen (2013a), a survey found that 79 per cent would consider doing so compared with 88 per cent of men. In more recent work, the Fawcett Society has found there to be no clear difference in the likelihood of *wanting* to stand for re-election (Bazeley et al 2017a) and yet women are more likely to serve a maximum of just two terms (65 per cent of women versus 57 per cent of men) (Allen 2013a). Furthermore, where councillors are in office for a long period of time, for at least 20 years, for every woman in this position there will be three equivalent men (Bazeley et al 2017a). Women therefore appear to serve for fewer successive terms.

The local council office can be a route into politics, at sub-regional, regional and national – and full-time – levels but with dropout rates such as these, it is unsurprisingly that it is predominantly men who make this transition (Allen 2013b, Bazeley et al 2017a). There is a challenge whereby if local politics and councils fail to engage and retain women, the democratic deficit within other institutions will persist.

Where women are involved in local politics, they are also often older, when caring responsibilities are perhaps less of a concern (Allen 2013a). The opportunities for political progression are again more limited and women's representation disproportionately skewed towards older individuals. Still male dominated, the 'most female' age group for councillors is 50–54 years (Kettlewell and Phillips 2014).

Women remain under-represented in local politics and, without significant intervention, any aspiration for equal representation in combined authorities is likely to stall.

It is clear that at each stage of the journey of progression within local politics there are barriers and sticking points where processes are either absent or

¹⁹ Excluding Cornwall as a one-council combined authority, where three of 10 cabinet members are women.

inadequate, so that women's representation is whittled away at every stage. They are not becoming party members, they are often not applying for selection, they are not being selected and they are not being elected.

There are 17,813 councillors in England, across all local authorities (Local Government Boundary Commission for England 2017). As the discussion above has demonstrated, we know that only 33 per cent of these are women, which amounts to approximately 5,878 women councillors (rounded to nearest whole number). If we are to achieve a 50:50 balance for England as a whole, there is a need for an additional 3,028 women councillors – an increase of 52 per cent on current levels. This is not an insurmountable number – across the Tees Valley combined authority, for example, its constituent member councils require only 27 more women councillors to reach gender parity – and yet it is unlikely to be achieved without more deliberate interventions. For wards contested in England there is a rough ratio of 4 candidates to every councillor seat (Rallings and Thrasher 2016) which means we could need as many as 12,114 women applicants coming forward and, crucially, being selected as candidates (IPPR calculations).

No party has achieved a 50:50 balance in the gender representation of their councillors and no new combined authority could be currently judged to be performing well on this measure given the over-reliance on local authority structures to provide the pipeline through which female representatives can come forward. Certainly, there are actions that local authorities can and should be taking, and the same is true of political parties, but there are also interventions that combined authorities should be making now to ensure that good practice on gender – and wider diversity issues – is established as central to their governance structures.

3.

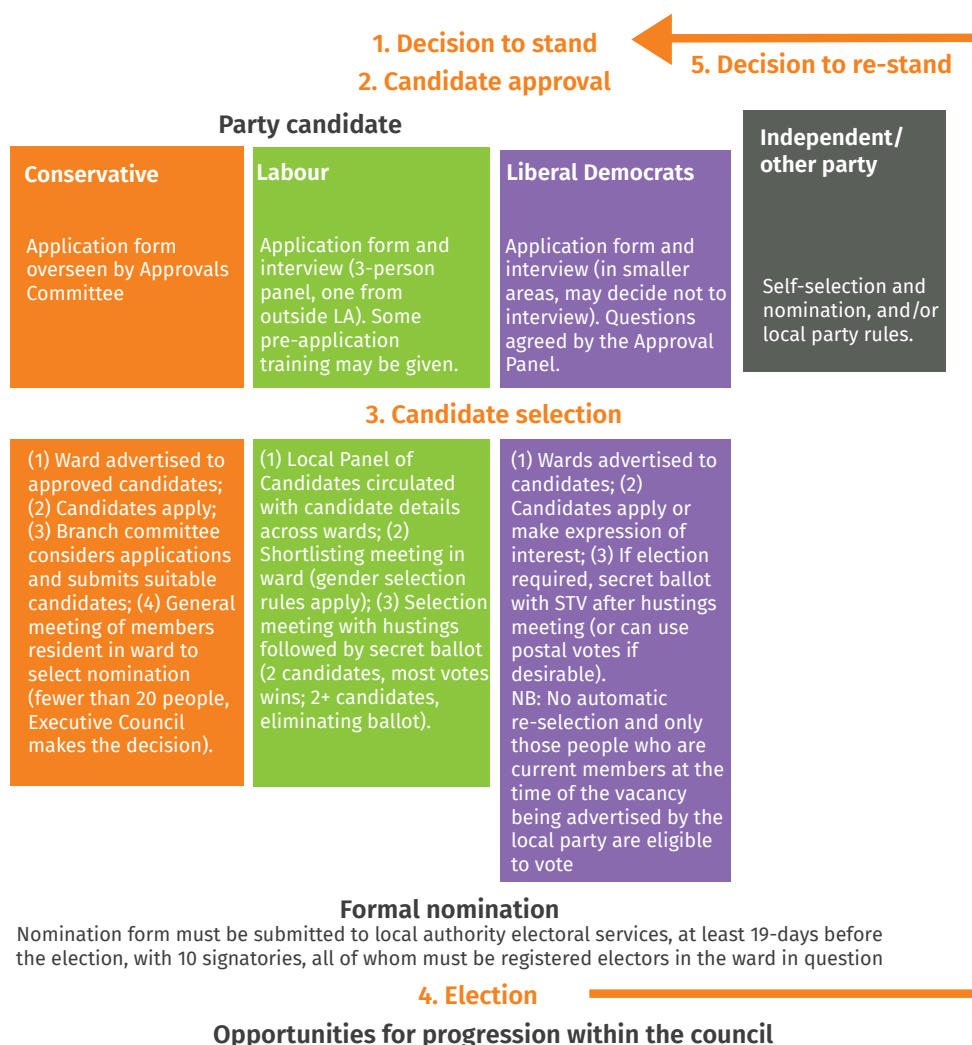
WHAT IS NOT WORKING? BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION

In this chapter, we consider the obstacles that women encounter as a way of identifying where interventions should be targeted and what these interventions should be. As the previous chapter demonstrated, women are found to 'lose out' at successive stages, be these party-based or within council conventions and practices.

WHERE ARE THE STICKING POINTS?

The routes that women – and men – will take in becoming a councillor are in many ways very similar across the political parties. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 demonstrate the points at which decisions are taken – by the individual, the party, the council leader or the council as a whole – and show the issues that can determine the likely success of a woman in progressing.

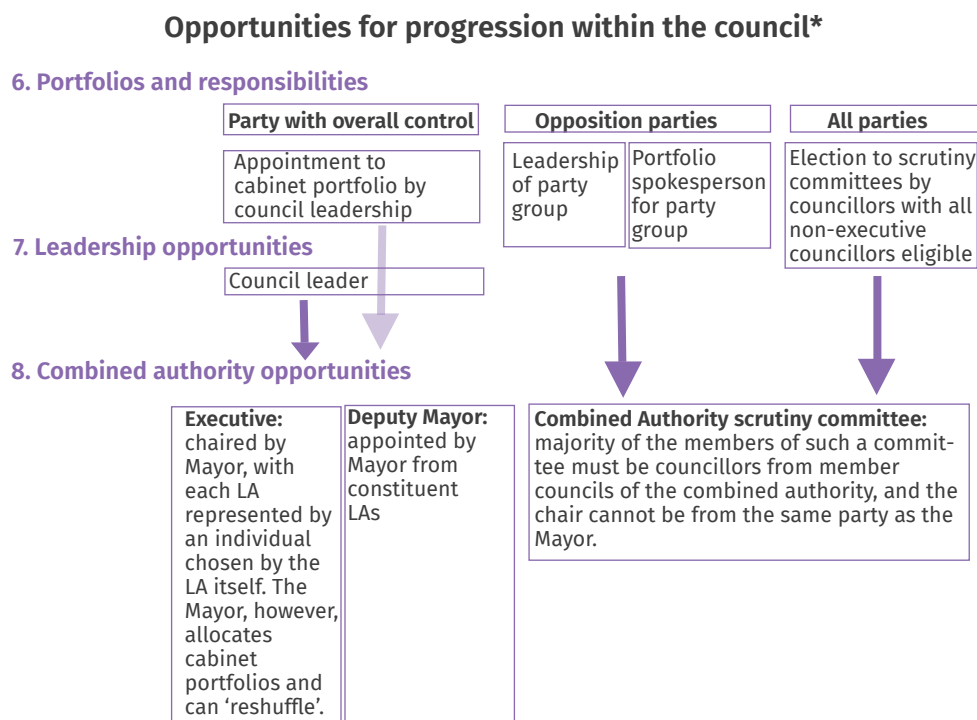
FIGURE 3.1
Becoming a councillor in England



Source: IPPR interviews with local councillors; LGA Conservative Group, *Stand for what you believe in: Be a Conservative party councillor* (LGA Conservative Group 2015); Labour Party, *2016 Rule Book* (Labour Party 2016); LGA Labour Group, *Be a Labour councillor: A guide for Labour party members* (LGA Labour Group 2016); LGA Liberal Democrat Group, *Are you under 30? Could you be a Liberal Democrat councillor?* (LGA Liberal Democrat Group 2016)

FIGURE 3.2

Progression opportunities within the council



*Assuming a cabinet-style model. Under a committee-model, a leader is elected by the council. They hold no executive power but assume a representative role for the council. Decisions are made by committees, comprising councillors of all parties, with membership proportionate to council composition.

Source: IPPR analysis

CHALLENGES IN RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

To understand the electoral success rates of female councillors, candidate selection is a crucial piece of the puzzle. Public opinion polling suggests that there is no widespread prejudice towards female representatives – for example, 55 per cent of British adults say they would favour more female MPs in the House of Commons (Cowley 2013). At the ballot box, when all things are equal, women do not appear to be viewed any less favourably by voters and can enjoy equal success (Borisyuk et al 2007, Kenny 2014). Attention should therefore focus instead on why women may or may not run for office, what deters them from seeking (re-) selection, and how experiences of being a candidate and councillor shape their decisions.

These can be divided into two key areas: (a) the job of a councillor and (b) party processes and support.

The job of a councillor

Workload and council culture

Councillors devote on average 23.1 hours a week to council duties (men 22.2 hours, women 23.9 hours) (Allen 2012), attending council committees and scrutiny meetings, holding ward surgeries, meeting with council officers and responding to constituent communications. The growth of email and social media has been reported to make the job even more demanding (House of Commons’ Communities and Local Government Committee 2012). While both men and women report not

feeling they have sufficient time as a key issue (Bazeley et al 2017a), interviews with female council leaders as part of this research found that while many are eager to encourage female councillors to re-stand, they often find women to be deterred by unmanageable time pressures, and more so than their male colleagues.

Councillors do not enjoy the privileges of full-time paid politicians who can access caseworkers or assistants, and they receive no salary – only certain allowances and expenses. Many employers, particularly small businesses, can struggle to support their staff in balancing employment and council duties due to their own resourcing concerns (House of Commons' Communities and Local Government Committee 2012). Unlike some other public servant positions, such as the Army Reserve, employers do not have to provide their employees with time off to undertake council activities or attend meetings.

Furthermore, there are longstanding expectations of evening meetings and late finishes, which can result in men demonstrating 'macho presenteeism', reinforcing a culture in which this is praised and women can feel unable to compete (CFWD 2011). A long history of evening-based council work – designed to permit councillors to be employed – also generates additional, informal expectations. In research with Welsh councillors by Farrell and Titcombe (2016), a male interviewee reported that 'we might have a knock about in the Chamber, but we are all friends in the pub afterwards', suggesting that many discussions continue outside of formal meetings and at times and places that may be more difficult for women to attend. There was a view among the study's female interviewees, for example, that an old boys' club attitude persists (ibid). Even where flexibility is available – work such as drop-in surgeries not being mandatory – a perception of workload, and a fear of not matching the amount of time put in by others, could also deter some women.

Female councillors have reported that a more masculine culture and environment in local politics makes them feel obliged to act in a 'macho' way to achieve success and recognition (Charles 2014, Farrell and Titcombe 2016). For example, women's approaches to decision-making are identified as more inclusive, seeking broader participation, stressing cooperation, and consulting more sources, yet local councils continue to be described by councillors themselves as more adversarial and strongly divided along party lines (Charles 2014).

While newer institutions elsewhere in the UK, such as the Scottish parliament and the national assembly for Wales, have started from a position in which gender equality and accessibility have been incorporated into their ethos and practices, local councils are much more established and, as such, more traditional attitudes and patterns of behaviour can continue to prevail. As one of the female councillors we interviewed commented, local government is 'a decade behind' other political institutions.

Work-life balance and gender discrimination

Female councillors are more likely than men to have caring responsibilities – 35 per cent compared with only 25 per cent, respectively (Kettlewell and Phillips 2014). It is also the case that trying to achieve a balance between domestic and council responsibilities is more likely to be a barrier for women than for men: 47 per cent of women report clashes with other caring commitments, compared with 26 per cent of men (Bazeley et al 2017a).

Ongoing societal pressures to undertake the majority of childcare and housework, alongside careers, have found many women reporting only feeling capable of continuing in politics, local or otherwise, with the support of a partner (Briggs 2000). Single parents may therefore find it much harder than other women, which

can restrict representation in the council to a particular set of female experiences based on specific family type.

There is no statutory requirement for councils to permit maternity leave. Female councillors we interviewed as part of this research reflected on being recommended to stand down from council duties when they had raised the issue with their council leaders. There is equally no pension associated with being a councillor, which is likely to be a factor for anyone weighing up whether to stay in work or dedicate themselves to being a councillor 'full time'.

The fact that women are disproportionately likely to be working in low-paid jobs such as those in health and social care, and face a continuing pay gap in comparison with men, compounds the fact that for many women it may be harder to justify extra hours spent on a council job rather than on family life or earning extra income.

More concerning are women's experiences of sexism encountered during their council activities; 38 per cent of female councillors report facing sexist comments when engaging with local party members and a third have experienced this when working in the council chamber itself (Bazeley et al 2017a). Ten per cent of female councillors have also experienced sexual harassment from other councillors (ibid). Therefore, while women may be ambitious and committed to staying in politics, negative personal experiences such as these, particularly if it is felt that they are not being challenged, may make them less likely to want to pursue future elections or higher-profile positions.

Finally, wider processes of socialisation and expectations of 'gender-appropriate' occupations still lead women to view politics as a 'man's game' and something that is not for them to engage with (Rao 2005). They are also less likely than their male counterparts to report receiving support from friends and family (see Allen 2013a).

Motivations and ambition

Women are more likely to take up a council position where they consider it a chance to serve their community (67 per cent), while only 7 per cent see it as the first step towards establishing a political career (ibid). As discussed in the previous chapter, it was the experience of several women we interviewed that their route into politics was motivated by a local issue prompting them to campaign and not an initial wish to be a career politician, nor through the encouragement of the local party to stand.

Nevertheless, research on progression aspirations suggests that there is little difference between men and women on their wanting to take up more senior positions within the council – a personal aim for 45 per cent of women and 47 per cent of men (Bazeley et al 2017a). So women are still ambitious despite some of the barriers they face and are often willing to explore ways to overcome obstacles or deterrents.

Therefore issues of supply and self-selection by women to stand in elections are key, but demand for female politicians is also critical to understanding their under-representation (Kenny 2015). It is not enough to have the motivation to succeed; women need the opportunities too.

Party processes and support

Political parties are key actors in bringing women into politics. Parties' public profile, the behaviour of MPs and political leaders and policies, all affect how women view politics as a whole and the extent to which they want to engage more generally – through elections, activism and party activities.

It is therefore important in the very first instance that parties look to appeal to women on a most basic level to encourage their membership and involvement. This may require them to rethink their own presentation and policies, and the extent to which they are and show themselves to be inclusive and aware of women's issues, but will also extend to wider perceptions of politics at national and local levels, whereby parties of all colours must work together to improve the image of politics. As has already been detailed, while political party membership is low among all parts of the electorate, it is particularly disproportionately skewed towards the over-representation of men.

In terms of political roles, parties are the 'gatekeepers' for these, and each operates its own 'gender regime', through which the selection and support of candidates takes place (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016). This can be formal and determined by rules, such as gender quotas and all-women shortlists, which set clear requirements internally on the number or proportion of women to be considered and selected as candidates. In other instances, it can be fairly informal, and shaped by networks, environment and culture. While attempts at professionalisation may exist – such as requiring personal statements and formal applications – patronage often still operates (ibid). This is especially true where processes are decentralised and – as in local contests – less high stake and high profile, so perhaps expecting less public scrutiny of selection procedures.

In established political institutions, such as local councils, issues of incumbency can limit the opportunities for women even where party rules exist. De-selecting a candidate who has served their community for a significant period of time and who has been successful in successive elections will not be a popular move. To enact more positive action measures, parties are reliant on retiring politicians, which can mean that it can take a long time for any change in rules to have a noticeable effect. On average, 80 per cent of councillors up for election in a given year will be standing for re-election (Bazeley et al 2017a).

Once in post, support from colleagues and party branches to re-stand and/or to seek higher levels of elected office, is also required. For example, male councillors appear significantly more likely to be encouraged to stand in a general election than their female counterparts (Allen 2013a). Our interviews with female councillors, across all parties, highlighted the important role that their peers have played in encouraging them to pursue more active roles in their local councils and to re-stand, while also acknowledging that there is room for more of this to be done. It is notable that many of the councillors we spoke to have discussed the responsibility they feel to support other women who are perhaps newer to the council to seek out more development and progression opportunities.

The positioning of female candidates across available constituencies and variable levels of support received from the national and local party will also determine their likely success as well as satisfaction with the experience. Evidence suggests that some women who are selected to stand as local council candidates experience gendered positioning. Here they are allocated to harder-to-win constituency seats, where an incumbent has a substantial majority, and more so than men (Borisyuk et al 2007).²⁰ This was echoed in our interviews, with some female councillors commenting on the 'fight' to be selected in a safe seat. In local contests, with councillors reporting an average length of service of 9.5 years (Kettlewell and Phillips 2014), turnover is low, leaving any new candidates (male or female) having to contest seats against established, typically male incumbents.

20 In the 2015 general election, only Labour had female candidates in more than half of its target seats (see CFWD 2015b). This coincided with it having the highest proportion of female MPs.

There is also evidence of clustering in local elections – the selection of one woman leading other parties to choose women in the same single-seat contest, so, in fact, reducing the overall representation of women possible following the election result (Borisyuk et al 2007). It also risks complacency whereby having achieved some representation for women in a given ward, the encouragement of further engagement by women in council elections is no longer prioritised.

Quotas or similar options are therefore not the answer on their own. However, if implemented alongside plans to ensure that women are not discriminated against in positioning and party support, they can be effective (Kenny 2015). Moreover, the high level of objection to quotas themselves presents a picture of a political world unwilling to acknowledge or tackle women’s representation. As such, women’s inclination to stand for election may be further reduced – perceptions of low candidate demand having the potential to impact directly on candidate supply.

Electoral systems and opportunities for gender balance

Traditionally, multi-member and proportional representation systems are seen to benefit women’s representation. In multi-member constituencies, the degree of one-on-one competition is much lower, which means that, in seats where women are up against other women, it will not necessarily reduce the overall (numerical) representation of women. Under proportional representation, voters are presented with a larger number of viable candidates, where there is greater potential for candidates outside the dominant parties to succeed. Thus, voters who might otherwise not vote or feel forced to vote for a limited pool have more freedom to vote for alternative, sometimes female, candidates.

England operates three types of electoral system across local elections, elected mayors and the London assembly, with differing degrees of proportionality (see table 3.1). While the London assembly performs better than local councils in its gender balance, suggestive of first-past-the-post’s weaknesses, as the Fawcett Society (2012) has argued, electoral reform should not be viewed as a panacea. Figures from the UK show (see figure 2.2) that in local government, female representation among councillors is actually higher in England than in Scotland and Northern Ireland, which use the single transferable vote – characterised by both multi-member constituencies and more proportionality.

TABLE 3.1
Electoral systems in operation for English elections

Legislative institution	Electoral system	Vote
England local elections	First past the post	One vote, vote for candidate, the person with the most votes wins
Directly elected mayors (England and Wales, including London)	Supplementary vote First- and second-preference vote for candidate, the person with the most votes wins through a process of first-preference elimination, and second-preference redistribution	
London assembly	Additional member system	Constituency/ward candidate elected through first past the post, with closed party list top-up through proportional representation

This review suggests that opportunities for increasing women’s representation in politics, at all levels, can be considered at three key stages:

- candidate emergence – the process by which a woman feels encouraged to put themselves forward for consideration as a candidate
- candidate selection – the process by which a woman is selected by their party to be a candidate
- candidate retention – the process by which a woman feels motivated and able to remain in politics, and to pursue future opportunities.

These stages come forward in women both being initially recruited into local politics *and* later being encouraged to pursue re-selection, positions of leadership or higher levels of regional or national office. The link between perceptions and experiences means that there is also overlap in the required strategies. For example, a perception of required time commitments may prevent an individual from putting themselves forward, while the lived experience of these commitments may deter an individual from standing for re-election or seeking potentially more demanding roles.

Interventions can also be categorised by the extent to which they focus on women themselves, or structures and systems that lead to women entering and staying in politics (see table 3.2).

TABLE 3.2
Types and examples of interventions to support women in politics

Examples of the empowerment model	Examples of structural/ institutional interventions	Examples of systemic interventions	
Candidate emergence	Confidence building	Changing party culture	
Candidate selection and election	Political skills training	Voluntary party all-women shortlists	Mandatory quotas, electoral systems
Candidate retention		Changing working hours	
Candidate progression into leadership roles	Mentoring for existing councillors	Manchester City Council allows non-leaders to be present at combined authority meetings and be able to vote	Requiring deputy leaders to be members of combined authorities

Source: IPPR analysis

The following chapter reviews lessons from other countries in relation to these key stages of the journey in local politics.

4.

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL POLITICS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM OTHER COUNTRIES?

There is a significant gap in the research relating to 'what works' to improve women's representation at the local and regional levels. The UK is far from alone in grappling with the issues involved; most countries in the world have political systems and local politics with majority male representation. Many are making efforts to improve the representation of women. Yet information on what has worked elsewhere and on transferable lessons for the UK is not readily available.

To inform our analysis of gender and devolution in England, we identified a number of case study countries from the UK and Europe: Germany, Sweden and the devolved nations – Scotland and Wales. The purpose of these comparator case studies was twofold:

- to understand the strategies and initiatives that are being developed in these countries to overcome the barriers to the greater involvement of women in politics, as outlined in chapter 3
- to investigate what we can learn from these case studies to improve women's representation in the emerging institutions of devolved government in England.

In the process of developing these case studies, our research also identified examples of initiatives designed to support and encourage women into politics in other countries, most notably Canada and the United States, as well as projects aimed at women's political participation in the UK. They provide further insights into what can be done to support a better gender balance in politics in terms of candidate emergence, selection, election and, subsequently, retention and progression in politics. We have included a selection of these examples in the Appendix.

SCOTLAND

The Scottish parliament's relatively recent establishment alongside the Welsh assembly has provided the opportunity to incorporate principles of gender equality into their structures, procedures and ethos (Charles 2014). As such, there are parallels to be drawn between what has been achieved in Scotland and Wales in terms of women's representation and the development of the new devolved structures in England.

Women's representation in national and local politics in Scotland

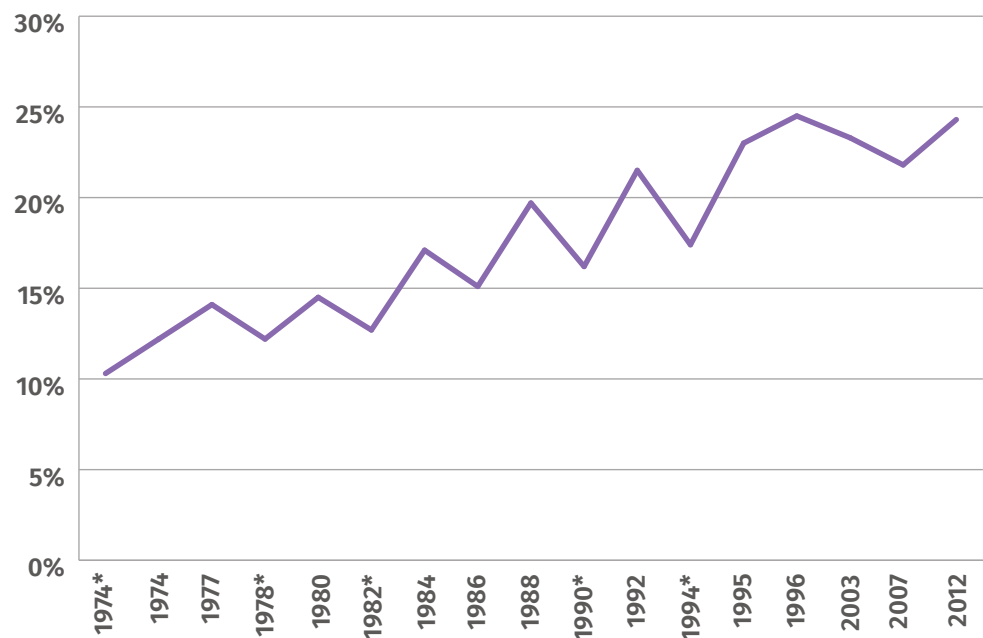
With four of its five main parties led (or co-led) by women, Scotland can invite praise for its high-profile representation of women in politics. Indeed, at 35 per cent, the Scottish parliament has a higher proportion of female representatives than Westminster (30 per cent). However, given that women comprise 52 per cent of Scotland's population (Engender 2016), the gender balance in the Scottish

assembly still falls far short of proportionate representation. Moreover, in council elections, Scotland performs worse than England – in 2013 just 24 per cent of elected councillors were women (versus 32 per cent in England). This is an improvement on historical rates. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, regional and district elections never saw more than a fifth of councillors being women (see figure 4.1). Analysis ahead of the 2017 local elections found that women comprised only 30 per cent of Scottish council candidates, with no party achieving a rate of 50 per cent. The Scottish Green party and the Scottish national party (SNP) were closest, at 45 per cent and 41 per cent, respectively (Women 50:50 2017a). There were also 21 wards with no women on the ballot paper.

FIGURE 4.1

The percentage of female councillors in Scotland has been growing over time but remains low

Percentage of councillors in Scotland who are women, 1974–2012



Source: Bochel H and Bochel C, 'Women candidates and councillors in Scottish local government, 1974–2012' (Bochel and Bochel 2016)

* Regional (rather than district) election.

The results of the 2017 local elections saw an increase in female councillors – from 24 to 29 per cent of all councillors – with the Scottish Greens almost reaching balance at 47 per cent. The SNP and Liberal Democrats returned 39 and 36 per cent female councillors, respectively, while Scottish Labour and Conservatives saw just 28 and 18 per cent of their elected councillors being women, respectively. While this is an improvement and moves Scotland closer to the rates in England, 103 wards (of 353) are all-male (Women 50:50 2017b).

The most gender-balanced political institution in Scotland historically has been at the community council level. Community councils are the first rung on the political decision-making ladder and as such provide an important mechanism to involve people in politics. In research conducted in 2009, there were over 1,100 community councils and 40 per cent of the community councillors involved were women (Siebert 2009). Their role as institutions is largely limited to small-scale community

projects, local newsletters and campaigning on neighbourhood issues but they nevertheless play an important role in local politics.

Women's tendency across the UK to be more involved in single-issue and/or non-party political activism may be one reason for their higher rates of participation at the community council level, as may the more local dimension. For example, in some parts of rural Scotland, travel distances will make attending council meetings particularly difficult for anyone with a caring responsibility or a job in the local community, as opposed to the urban centre. Community councils may therefore appear to be a more accessible option.

Meanwhile, as in England, women councillors can struggle to access leadership positions within council structures, despite the high profile of women in many of their parties. Where they do hold cabinet positions, these are more likely to be on community, education, children, social care and housing, than they are to be on policy and strategy, infrastructure and finance (Bochel and Bochel 2016). Following the 2012 local elections, only one local authority in Scotland was being led by a woman (Kenny and McKay 2012). This situation has improved marginally, with the total in 2016 having risen to five (16 per cent of council leaders), and 41 per cent of council chief executives also being women (Davidson 2016), but male dominance remains.

These patterns are found in community councils too even when women have historically been more active and well represented, and so where there is a larger pool from which to select individuals for leadership roles. For example, in 2007, women had a representation rate of 40 per cent yet made up only 30 per cent of community council chairs. In contrast, women comprised 55 per cent of secretaries (Siebert 2009).

Improving women's representation: what can be learned from Scotland?

Party quotas and the electoral system

Because Scotland uses electoral systems that place greater emphasis on proportional representation – currently employing the additional member system in elections to the Scottish parliament and the single transferable vote for Scottish local elections – there are more opportunities for women to gain representation in Scotland by virtue of electoral mechanics. However, electoral reform is not a panacea. Figures show (see figure 2.2) that in local government, female representation among councillors is actually higher in England than in Scotland, which operates under the first-past-the-post system, and lower in Scotland and Northern Ireland, which use the single transferable vote.

In the first Scottish parliament elections in 1999, the use of proportional lists within the additional member system – helped by the absence of any incumbents – enabled Labour to implement quotas through a policy of 'twinning and zipping'. Here, constituency candidates are selected in tandem (one male, one female) and with regard to the 'winnability' of seats, so that women and men receive equal access to seats where the party is expected to do well. A placement policy through 'twinning and zipping' on the regional party lists was also enacted. The SNP adopted a more informal approach but still sought to try to position women favourably in the party lists so as to maximise their likely election success. The result was that 50 per cent and 43 per cent of Labour and SNP Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) elected in 1999 were women, respectively (see Kenny 2013).

In 2012, Scottish Labour committed to placing female candidates in half of all vacant seats during the Scottish local elections, resulting in an increase in female councillors from 18 to 26 per cent, 2007–2012 (Kenny and McKay 2012). In 2016, the

SNP for the first time employed formal measures to boost women's candidature by using all-women shortlists in elections to the Scottish parliament. Given the SNP's growth in political representation and membership, this marks an important commitment. However, as the above point suggests, this could only be pursued in nine seats, those in which the incumbents were standing down (see Engender 2016).

The use of quotas or other more formal measures have not caught on more widely in Scotland, however (Kenny and McKay 2014). Labour, and more recently the SNP, have largely been the exception, with other parties in Scotland lagging behind. Commitments to boosting women's participation in election contests have also been variably applied at the different electoral levels given Scotland's multi-level governance structures. There is therefore the potential for more to be done.

The leadership effect: role models and mentoring

Scotland is notable for the high profile of women in politics, most evident in its party leadership. However, at a local level, women are unlikely to be council leaders, suggesting that there are still limited opportunities for women to reach the top positions. Nevertheless, female leadership on the national stage can be of great importance in providing role models to future generations of women engaging in politics. It is unlikely that the full impact of this can be assessed at the present time. However, it could have an impact – previous research in the United States by Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006), for example, found that a rise in opportunities for political discussion and engagement among adolescent girls occurs as the number of female politicians being given high-profile media coverage increases.

Research by the YWCA has found role models to be a dominant idea among young women in Scotland and a way of boosting gender equality and female involvement in politics. The research goes on to note that, from interviews, Nicola Sturgeon was frequently mentioned as a positive role model (YWCA 2015). The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP), initiated in 1999 for 14- to 25-year-olds elected to represent local areas and voluntary organisations, found that in 2016, women outnumbered men for the first time since its establishment – 48 per cent women versus 44 per cent men, with 8 per cent self-identifying as non-binary or other (SYP 2016). In part this may be a response to a role-model effect and the impact of a female first minister.

Young Scot, Scotland's national youth and citizenship charity, is running a new competition that will award one woman in Scotland, aged between 18 and 23 years, the opportunity of a year's mentoring from the first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, and involving at least four private meetings (Young Scot 2017). Young Scot will complement the scheme by offering additional development opportunities, in line with the winning mentee's interests and goals. The year 2017 will be the first time that the competition has been run and so its impact in terms of awareness raising and on the winning mentee is yet to be evaluated. However, schemes like this, if rolled out further and to more people, could offer the opportunity to link Scotland's high-profile female politicians to those they seek to influence and inspire.

Kezia Dugdale MSP, current leader of the Scottish Labour party, has also taken a clear step towards promoting women's representation in politics, as a member of the steering group for the 'Women 50:50' campaign. This campaign has support from four of Scotland's five main political parties and is working towards a Scottish parliament in which women represent half of all MSPs. The presence of a party leader on this steering group, alongside SNP and Green party MSPs, again shows women in positions of power in Scotland taking direct steps to encourage even more women to get involved in politics and to challenge some of the barriers that remain to their getting selected, elected and re-elected.

Nevertheless, despite the importance of leadership and mentoring, the media's portrayal of female leaders in the media can be detrimental to women's views of how welcome they will be made to feel in the world of politics, and its accessibility. Young women report their frustrations at coverage they feel is sexist, subjects female politicians to a higher level of scrutiny and permits personal attacks (YWCA 2015). This was echoed in our interviews, where concerns about public profile and the likelihood of negative social media targeting was found to be a key deterrent that prevented women from standing for council elections in Scotland in 2017.

Empowering women: local cross-party initiatives

The presence of women in leadership positions is, as discussed, not a guaranteed way of getting more women involved in politics. As one of our interviewees highlighted, grassroots activity is also vital.

In Scotland, there are examples of women organising *across* party-political lines to encourage women into politics at a local level. One example is the 'Women for Council' initiative in Inverclyde. On gender balance, Inverclyde was Scotland's worst-performing council in 2012, with just one of 20 councillors being a woman. Following a year of activity, starting in 2016, this has increased to three female councillors in 2017 – all of whom were involved in the Women for Council initiative – with 11 candidates across the ballot papers. In one ward, as many as five women are standing as candidates (Baxter 2017). Activities included:

- street stalls to raise awareness of women's (relative lack of) representation on the council and to increase interest among women in the area
- follow-up meetings with interested women and prospective candidates to offer training and support with preparation for party vetting and campaigning.

One of the major barriers encountered was party selection procedures, however (interview with Women for Council member). The experience of the group was often that there were many women, including young women (typically under-represented in local councils), willing and able to get involved but they faced significant obstacles in getting through political party vetting. They were often met by resistance from established party members and councillors, typically male, who were reported to offer little guidance and support to help women new to formal politics to navigate this process.

WALES

Following a referendum in 1997, the Welsh assembly in its current form was established in 1999. The Welsh assembly is home to 60 assembly members, of whom 40 represent local constituencies of Wales and are elected on a first-past-the-post basis and 20 represent the five Welsh regions and are elected on a proportional basis via the additional member system.

Women's representation in national and local politics in Wales

In the Welsh assembly, 42 per cent of assembly members are women. This compares favourably with the Northern Ireland assembly where women represent 30 per cent of the assembly (Roberts 2016) and Scotland, where the figure is 35 per cent. Indeed, since its inception, the Welsh assembly has consistently had a higher proportion of female assembly members than Westminster and the assemblies in Northern Ireland and Scotland, never falling below 40 per cent and reaching a peak of 50 per cent representation in 2003 (Cullinane 2016). It is also higher than the Westminster average of just 30 per cent. In terms of power structure, three out of the eight members of the Welsh assembly cabinet are women (60 per cent).

However, beyond the Welsh assembly the picture on gender equality is much more mixed. Women occupy just 27 per cent of local councillor positions and research

by the Equality and Human Rights Commission suggests that during the recent 2017 local council elections in Wales, just under 30 per cent of candidates fielded were women, and in some areas, just 20 per cent of candidates were women (EHRC 2011). In Westminster constituencies, 29 seats at Westminster are filled by men compared with 11 women.

Improving women's representation: what can be learned from Wales?

The higher than average female representation in the Welsh assembly has not emerged by accident but can be traced back to deliberate attempts by political parties in Wales to increase the number of women in public life, as well as wider moves to support women's involvement in political life (Evans and Harrison 2012). These have included equality guarantees and measures to promote equality, leadership and mentoring.

Equality guarantees

Equality guarantees have been implemented by Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru. Other parties, including the Welsh Liberal Democrats (while active nationally) and Welsh Conservatives, have made limited or no attempts to adopt similar measures. Measures have included the following:

- **Gender quotas – twinning and zipping.** Following devolution, gender quotas were adopted by Welsh Labour and Scottish Labour. The Welsh Labour party used 'twinning and zipping' in the 1998 Welsh assembly elections to ensure that neighbouring constituencies had equal representation, that is, one man and one woman. Plaid Cymru has also used 'zipping'²¹ in relation to the additional member system to support higher rates of female representation on a regional basis.
- **All-women shortlists.** All-women shortlists were introduced by Welsh Labour in the 1993 Welsh assembly elections and it has been suggested that they were the main factor behind the 50:50 split within the assembly in 2003. However, their use has not been without controversy, with some frustration among men within the parties who wanted to contest a particular seat (Silversmith 2016).

While the most immediate effect of gender equality in the assembly has been an improvement in the number of elected representatives, evidence from Chaney (2008) shows that female assembly members are more likely to ask questions about issues affecting women, such as unequal pay, childcare and women's health. In addition, several key pieces of legislation have been passed by the assembly in recent years, for example:

- the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act was passed in 2015
- the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act was passed in 2015, which works towards a 'more equal Wales'.

Despite the concern that progress to influence gender equality in the Welsh assembly has stagnated somewhat (Larner 2016), the assembly is an example of how the devolution process can be used as an opportunity to discontinue the 'pre-existing era of male dominated politics' (Chaney 2008).

Equality promotion and leadership

Gender equality in Wales has been supported by the presence of high-profile female leaders within politics and the promotion of equality within political parties, which has been supported by gender activists from local parties. Commentators have argued that better representation of women has also emerged

21 Zipping is the practice of alternating men and women on party lists, which is facilitated by the assembly members in Wales.

through the campaigning work of female activists within the political parties, particularly Welsh Labour, Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Liberal Democrats, all of which have prioritised gender equality (Squires 2005). Furthermore, Chaney (2008) makes the point that mechanisms such as the cross-party equality committee within the Welsh assembly have provided the opportunity to restructure ‘gendered dimensions of power’. Specifically, he means that mechanisms like this committee have provided a new space for women from wider civic and civil society to join the debate on gender equality through their role as committee advisors. This has included representatives from local government and trade unions as well as organisations such as the Wales Women’s National Coalition and Chwarae Teg.²² This, Chaney argues, is important because it enables women to influence the wider political agenda and keep the debate on gender equality within the assembly visible.

GERMANY

How does Germany perform on women’s representation in local and regional politics?

Germany performs better at higher levels of government than at local levels in terms of the number of female representatives. Whereas 36.5 per cent of members of the national parliament are women, only 32.5 per cent of members of the state parliaments are women and 24 per cent of members of local parliaments representing more than 10,000 inhabitants are women (Kletzing 2016). However, figures for local parliaments with smaller constituencies are not readily available and have not been gathered by independent researchers.

Due to the large number of councils in Germany, it is difficult to track the gender of all councillors, and there is no mandatory reporting. Particularly at the most local level, statistics detailing gender representation are not readily available. Individual Länder have instituted data collection, such as Baden Wurttemberg; and at the national level the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth conducts surveys of local councillors and publishes the results alongside what electoral data is available (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth 2016). The Heinrich Böll Foundation, associated with the Green party, also gathers information on representation in German cities and publishes them in a regular ranking of cities.²³

As well as being under-represented in assemblies in parliaments, women are also under-represented in local and regional leadership positions in Germany. While Germany currently has a female chancellor and women in a third of federal minister roles, only three out of 16 state prime ministers are women, 39.9 per cent of heads of state ministries are women, 23.6 per cent of heads of departments of local public administrations are women and 10 per cent of mayors and district chief executives are women (Kletzing 2016). In 2015, of 168 heads of government, ministers and senators working for state governments, 37.5 per cent were women (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth 2016).

At the local level, gender representation in leadership positions is worse; of 435 top positions in administrative district and municipal councils,²⁴ just 46 positions (10.6 per cent) were held by women. Furthermore, our interviewees reported

22 Chwarae Teg is a Cardiff-based charity that campaigns for women’s equality in Wales in three ways: supporting the development of women’s confidence, supporting employers to engage with gender equality issues and working with influencers, educators and decision-makers to build a society that supports gender equality.

23 See <https://www.boell.de/en>

24 Leading administrative positions include lord mayors and chief administrative officers of districts (Landrätinnen and Landräte). Mayors of municipalities belonging to a district are not included, even though they may hold the title of ‘lord mayor’.

gendered differences in which policy portfolios men and women councillors are likely to hold, with women more likely to have responsibility for traditionally 'female' roles such as social policy.

Improving women's representation: what can be learned from Germany?

A number of initiatives and policies in Germany potentially offer interesting lessons for the UK as it seeks to improve women's representation in local and regional politics.

Empowerment programmes

Helene Weber Kolleg, EAF Berlin

The Helene Weber Kolleg scheme is an initiative aiming to get more women into local politics by creating a network of support, providing coaching and mentoring. It was set up in 2011, following several activities funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and carried out by the European Academy for Women in Politics and Business (EAF Berlin).

The initiative supports both women who are interested in entering local politics, as well as those who are already in municipal government and would like to progress. The initiative is cross-party; over half of participants are members of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU). The main activities of the Helene Weber Kolleg scheme are as follows:

- The **Helene Weber award** prestigiously recognises outstanding female local politicians. Candidates are nominated by the Bundestag and selected for the award by a jury chaired by the Federal Ministry (BMFSFJ). The award encourages these women to continue in politics by recognising their achievements. Recipients receive coaching and access to the networking activities among the Helene Weber award winners. The award also encourages the recipients to act as role models for others. The award winners receive a budget for **local initiatives** that encourage and support women interested in local politics.
- Several **mentoring programmes** focus on increasing the motivation, knowledge and capacity of participants who are not yet elected but are informally involved. Mentors are successfully elected local politicians, among them the recipients of the Helene Weber award. By 2015, the mentoring programmes had supported 65 mentoring pairs. Mentoring includes shadowing and seminars on topics such as assertiveness.
- Other activities include **international exchanges, conferences, a website** with information for women looking to enter politics and a travelling **exhibition** on the 'mothers of German basic law' who enshrined the equality of women, to raise awareness and debate on the topic of women in politics.

One of the main benefits of the scheme is that it helps women to build networks with more established female politicians, and across parties. 'For the women it's a very good experience to be with women from other parties – they learn it's the same in every party' (IPPR interview with Uta Kletzing).²⁵ It therefore relies on the active support of the community of women who have received the award as well as politicians and other actors who want to support more women into politics.

SPD Academy (SPD-Parteischule im Willy-Brandt-Haus)

The Social Democratic Party of Germany's (SPD) Academy runs training programmes for both men and women looking to stand for office within the SPD, and those wishing to progress within the party. Its municipal academy, founded

25 People were interviewed on the basis of anonymity except where this was waived.

in 2001, is targeted at 20- to 40-year-olds who already have some kind of elected mandate. It has had 42 per cent female participants, despite women making up only 29 per cent of eligible candidates, and 1,700 people have participated in total.

Its 'Leadership academy of social democracy', founded in 2007, offers advanced training for leading politicians. Around half of participants have successfully progressed into higher levels of politics. The youth section of the party, Jusos, also runs training programmes targeted at young people, including young women, on soft skills, local government and communication.

Since 2010, the academy has also run programmes specifically targeted at women, which aim to 'help women find their own way through the party, rather than being patronising' (IPPR interview with Klaus Tovar and Dennis Eigheten). These are:

- **Women to Power.** This programme is aimed at women who are already involved in local politics in some way, perhaps in a local activist or unremunerated position, who would like to do more. The programme is competitive (only around 50 per cent of applicants are selected and the scheme has only 150 participants) and selection is based on written application. Participants attend two three-day seminars, with female facilitators for the sessions coming from a range of backgrounds so that participants can easily relate to at least one. Topics for the seminars include analysis of gender and politics as well as participants' own skillsets, such as leadership and debating.
- **Women in Leading Power.** Together with the Bundes SGK (which represents local SPD associations), the SPD academy began offering a municipal training (mentoring) course for women hoping to progress within local politics. The programme, which is still in its infancy, includes coaching for women already in office, such as councillors and mayors, and mentoring to develop women's networks to match men's.

All programmes have been very highly rated by participants, and are subject to formal evaluations.

Changing party structures and rules

Gender quotas within parties

The Green party was the first party to use gender quotas in Germany in the 1980s, with a requirement of 50 per cent of electoral list places going to women, and the top slot being reserved for a woman (Davidson-Schmich 2008). The SDP and Die Linke adopted gender quotas shortly afterwards (40 per cent and 50 per cent respectively); this is reflected in much higher and improving rates of female participation in these parties in comparison with others – as high as 40 per cent of Green party municipal councillors (Holtkamp and Schnittke 2008). Parties on the right have weaker gender quotas, such as the CDU's 33 per cent 'women's quorum' on electoral lists, which must be followed unless enough qualified candidates are not found (leaving substantial room for interpretation) (ibid). The Free Democratic party (FDP) is the only party with no kind of gender quota, and has a correspondingly low proportion of municipal elected members who are women – at 18 per cent in 2007 (Holtkamp and Schnittke 2008).

The voluntary party quotas differ quite substantially; they range from no quotas, to 50 per cent quotas, from concrete regulations for party lists with a 'zipper' system with alternating male and female candidates, to quotas for unelected senior party positions only. For example, the Green party requires male and female co-chairs, the SDP requires that one of the top two posts should go to a woman, and the CDU requires that one of the top three posts should go to a woman but only provided a suitable female candidate can be found. As well as directly increasing the number of women, quotas should act to 'open the door to cultural change' within parties,

as having more women in positions of power becomes normalised and male dominance denormalised (IPPR interview with Uta Kletzing).

Current gender quotas are voluntary promises, and enforcement varies. Hamburg and Bremen are among the states where quotas are consistently implemented, while southern states such as Baden-Württemberg and Bayern have the lowest rates of quota implementation (Davidson-Schmich 2008). Implementation of quotas is also generally weaker at the local level, where the central party has less control over who is selected and how (Davidson-Schmich 2006).

With voluntary gender quotas established as a normal and useful feature of politics, women's campaign groups in Germany are turning their attention to achieving a 'parity law' in Germany, as there is for example in France. This would require all parties to have equal numbers of men and women on party lists. Different actions for a parity law have been initiated in nine out of 16 German states since 2007, with campaigners currently waiting for the outcome of a lawsuit in Bavaria. Opponents argue that this would 'interfere with the freedom of political parties and political elections' provided by the basic law, and that the same aims can be achieved with empowerment programmes (Kletzing 2016). However, the evidence suggests that legal quota provisions do indeed accelerate progress to gender equality and correspond with the gender equality provision of the basic law.

Systemic change for gender equality

Proportional representation and larger districts

One of the key differences both between the UK and Germany, and within Germany, is the electoral system. German electoral systems for local government vary by state. Some electoral system designs act as a barrier to gender representation, such as where councillors are elected in single-member districts by plurality.²⁶ This generally results in fewer women winning elections. In the worst cases, multiple parties may field their female candidates in the same seats as a competitive response, meaning only one woman from those constituencies can be elected (IPPR interview). However, the natural experiment of the German federal system is helpful in revealing where particular electoral system designs can act as catalysts for greater female representation. For example, multi-member districts, larger districts and closed-list proportional representation systems in general have higher rates of female representation. Open lists may disadvantage women by allowing more scope for voters' preferences for men over women to affect the result, although as described in chapter 3, whether voters are prejudiced against women is contested (Cowley 2013).

Institutional support for gender equality

The German national government has demonstrated its efforts to prioritise gender equality in both policymaking and local representation. For example, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (2016) publishes an 'atlas' of gender representation in politics and the economy and makes sustained efforts to push gender equality and gender mainstreaming. European Union (EU) policymaking also has a 'strong influence on the institutionalisation of gender-equality policies in Germany, and EU initiatives on gender mainstreaming have stimulated debate about respective instruments and institutional mechanisms' (EIGE no date).

Gender equality is also increasingly becoming institutionalised at the regional level. A department or unit for gender equality now exists in almost all

26 This system is used to elect the UK parliament.

states. Since 1991, state ministers with responsibility for gender equality and women's affairs have met at a conference together with national government representatives every year. Gender mainstreaming, budgeting and strategy are rising up the agenda, although not consistently yet across states or below the state level.

SWEDEN

How does Sweden perform on the representation of women in local and regional politics?

Sweden is known in Europe and globally for its record on women's representation in politics. Across Swedish local government, women hold 45.1 per cent of all elected seats.²⁷ This figure is the result of equality policies and norms being adopted at all levels of government and society. Equal gender representation in Sweden is a priority for government and is seen as a means of solving many of society's challenges, resulting in Sweden scoring number one in the EU Gender Equality Index (European Parliament Directorate 2015). The majority of improvements in gender representation at all levels of government took place in the 1970s and 1980s, and since then the percentage of women elected has remained above 40 per cent.

In considering the key lessons from Sweden, it is important to highlight that they reflect a long-term social and cultural shift in attitudes and policy in relation to women's role, both in politics and also in wider society. Institutional structures that support women's participation in politics include strong anti-discrimination laws – legislation that has improved women's participation in the labour market.

Sweden's proportional representation electoral system has also allowed political parties to manage provisions for including women on party lists. High voter turnout among women (84 per cent) creates an environment where Swedish parties, in order to be representative, include a high number of women in their party lists and must address gender equality issues to appeal to female voters.

Improving women's representation: what can be learned from Sweden?

Women's groups within political parties

Women's groups within political parties were first established as far back as the 1920s and have continually maintained women's demands at a political level. Aside from the Swedish SDP, almost all Swedish parties have women's federations that work towards women's demands and promote the place of women in political responsibilities. These federations were established in order to attract female voters and pushed their parties to adopt targets, such as the SDP's commitment in 1987 that no gender would represent less than 40 per cent.

Today these federations organise training sessions for newly elected female representatives, propose candidates for electoral lists (Gaspard and Heinen 2004) and implement initiatives to support the progression of women. For example, the SDP provides baby-sitting assistance, children's activities at conferences and compensation for salary reduction to assist women to be active in party politics and local governance (Freidenvall 2003). These initiatives are replicated in government with family-friendly sittings, childcare provision and support structures for female members (Potter 2014).

²⁷ This figure is calculated as the average of the percentage of women elected in 2014 in Rikstag, county council and municipal elections (source: Statistics Sweden).

Equality guarantees – Varannan Damernas

In 1987, a government commission on the representation of women published a report entitled *Varannan Damernas* (SOU 1987). Some parties, under pressure from feminist organisations and women's federations within parties, have implemented 'Varannan Damernas' (literally translating to 'every other one for the ladies') systems to ensure women's representation. These Varannan Damernas alternating systems were implemented by the SDP, the Left party and the Green party, starting in 1994 after the relatively low proportion of elected women in the 1991 elections. The adoption of the system by certain parties created momentum, which compelled all parties to strongly reconsider their representation of women in order to maintain competitiveness in local and Rikstag elections. The SDP continued Varannan Damernas once it entered government in 1994 by appointing women to half of all ministerial positions.

The term 'quota' is seldom used as it can imply that women are not qualified for the positions; instead, the term 'alternated lists' or Varannan Damernas is used to describe this practice. Even those parties without alternated lists are incentivised to engage in gender equality practices in order to appeal to Swedish voters, particularly after 1994 where all parties were in competition to champion the gender equality cause.

Mentoring initiatives

Mentoring initiatives typically bring elected female representatives together with new women's representatives to educate and assist them in undertaking their political role and provide moral support for them in their political work. Initiatives include the following:

Maktsalongen – supporting young leaders

Maktsalongen (Power Salon) is a non-governmental organisation that targets young women in civil society and helps them to achieve positions of leadership, including in the fields of local governance, businesses and society in general. Maktsalongen works primarily via creating networks of women in leadership to assist and empower the young women. Although not a direct contributor to increased women's participation in local government, the initiative aims to create female leaders in civil society and helps with training and networking to prepare them for their role.

JämKom

The JämKom (women and men working together) project was established by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities in 1995 to stimulate the development of gender mainstreaming in local policy processes (Alpkvist 2011). Mock working sessions were set up by municipalities to train men and women to become more aware of the gender implications of their decisions (Woodward 2002). The project developed the 3R method, which since then has been used by other committees and administrative authorities (Åseskog 2003). The first R – representation – explores the representation of both sexes in the decision-making process. The second R – resources – looks at whether there is an equal distribution of resources (including time, money and space) between both sexes. The third R – realia – looks at how representation and resource distribution are determined and how gender norms and other factors contributed to the situation of the previous two Rs.

This method is relevant to gender representation in local government due to the first R of representation. The development of this initiative by local councils in the UK would highlight whether women had an equal influence as decision-making councillors. Furthermore, the method would explore the level of gender equality within the employment practices of local government.

CONCLUSIONS

The case studies presented in this chapter provide insights into what has worked to improve women’s representation in local and national politics in a range of countries. A summary of the most successful initiatives is given in table 4.1. These demonstrate the importance of support for women’s representation institutionally (for example by national and local government) but also at different stages in the democratic process, from candidate emergence and selection through to retention and progression (for example by political parties, government and civil society).

TABLE 4.1

Different types of initiatives to increase women’s representation across the case study countries

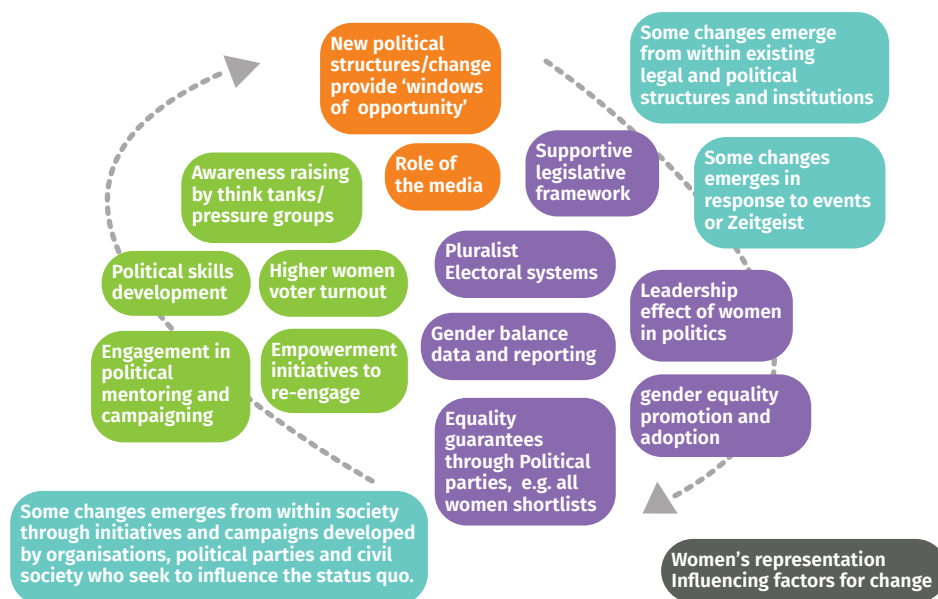
	Devolved nations (Scotland and Wales)	Germany	Sweden
Institutional support for women’s representation	Element of proportional representation through additional member system (Scotland and Wales) Cross-party equality committee (Wales)	Proportional representation electoral system Federal funding for initiatives to support women’s representation, for example the Helene Weber Kolleg scheme	Proportional representation electoral system Gender mainstreaming within policy Equal opportunities ombudsman Gender equality policy
Emergence initiatives	Young Scot Women for Independence Gender quotas and all-women shortlists	Helene Weber Kolleg scheme including information exchange, mentoring and online support	Maktsalongen (supporting young leaders)
JämKom (women and men working together)			
Selection and election initiatives	Scottish Youth Parliament ‘Women 50:50’ campaign	SPD Academy –Women to Power programme	Varannan Damernas – gender quotas
Retention and progression initiatives	Women in Public Life	Helene Weber Kolleg award recognising outstanding local female politicians SPD Academy – Women in Leading Power programme	Women’s federations within political parties

Source: IPPR analysis

It is also possible to understand how change occurs in women’s representation in politics by considering the different types of factors that, from an analysis of the case studies, appear to have an influence. These influencing factors are summarised in figure 4.2.

FIGURE 4.2

Characteristics of a devolved authority that are conducive for higher levels of women’s representation



Source: IPPR analysis

Few countries have got female political representation right. As we have seen, Sweden comes closest with 45.1 per cent representation of women in local government. However, this is in large part due to the strength of feminist politics in Sweden over decades, which has led to greater equality in labour market participation, family policy and gender rights. This creates ideal conditions for more equal political participation.

Political systems based on proportional representation appear, on the whole, to increase opportunities to achieve gender equality. This is true in countries such as France, Germany and Sweden where the practices of ‘alternating lists’ and ‘twinning and zipping’ are frequently carried out. Such practices, as well as an absence of incumbents, also helped to achieve the greater gender balance we see in devolved parliaments in Scotland and Wales and the London assembly. However, given the limited opportunities for using proportional representation in the context of local government in England, quotas – whether set at the level of an institution or all-women shortlists for an individual area, ward or constituency – are the next best option.

Overall, we identify the following key lessons in terms of ‘what works’ to improve female representation based on evidence from initiatives and policies in other countries:

- **It is much easier to create gender-equal systems from scratch, than to try to change them once established.** Examples here include the Scottish and Welsh devolved assemblies, and the London assembly, which designed quotas for proportional representation electoral systems to secure greater proportions of women in these institutions from the start. In established institutions, incumbency prevents swift change.
- **Parties are the gatekeepers of power and instrumental in changing access to politics as well as progression within it.** This is true both negatively, in the sense of local informal party processes that exclude women where rules do not exist or are not properly enforced, and positively, for example in the case

of the German SDP's 'Leadership academy of social democracy', which provides training for talented politicians looking to progress. The programme has a 42 per cent female participant rate despite women making up only 29 per cent of eligible candidates. Around half of participants have successfully progressed into higher levels of politics.

- **Non-governmental and governmental institutions can also effectively drive and monitor progress.** For example, the non-governmental organisation-led 'She Should Run' programmes in North America have been effective in encouraging large numbers of women to run for elected office, based on evidence suggesting the power of informal encouragement from family, friends and colleagues. In other countries, national governments take responsibility for improving gender representation on a cross-party basis. For example, in Germany, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth sponsors high-profile empowerment schemes, and in Sweden, the Ministry for Gender Equality maintains a focus on gender representation and the reporting of discrimination.
- **Quotas are highly effective in triggering a step change in representation.** In Germany, direct action taken by political parties in the form of quotas – for example the 40 and 50 per cent quotas in Germany set by the SDP and Die Linke respectively – have achieved much higher levels of representation in these parties, but the CDU on the right also has a 33 per cent 'women's quorum' on electoral lists.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that the disturbing levels of under-representation we have identified in this report will persist unless there is a significant drive to get more women into politics at the local level in the first place. In comparison with many of the other countries we have profiled, political parties, institutions and government in England appear complacent about under-representation. Existing efforts to recruit more women into local and national politics are far too small-scale.

In terms of progression within local government and into the leadership of local and combined authorities, current levels of representation pose significant challenges for representative democracy; specifically, the vanishingly small numbers of women on combined authority boards and on the leadership of councils with agreed devolution deals.

Our recommendations are based on the international evidence examined earlier for how improvements in gender representation in local and national government have been achieved in other countries. It is clear that significant step changes in representation have largely come about as a result of adopting equality measures such as gender quotas to over-turn institutional complacency, engrained discriminatory practices and low expectations. But positive action schemes and empowerment programmes have also had a very important role to play.

Our recommendations therefore lay out a vision for how local and combined authorities can achieve better gender representation through three key routes: Our recommendations therefore lay out a vision for how combined authorities can achieve better female representation through three key routes:

- increasing the numbers of women in local government
- building a longer-term talent pipeline for more women in senior positions
- reforming existing and future combined authority structures.

We focus less on how to achieve improved retention and progression of women in local government through improved workplace practices and culture change in government because extensive recommendations for this have been made elsewhere (eg Bazeley et al 2017b).

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Getting more women into local politics

The UK does not currently require political parties or local government to report on the representation of women or protected groups in terms of party membership, the initial recruitment and selection of candidates or successfully elected candidates. Doing so would allow for the performance of parties on recruiting women in equal numbers to men to be understood and assessed.

The Fawcett Society has recommended amending section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 to include local government, with responsibility placed on local councils to collect data rather than on political parties (Bazeley et al 2017b). While local government should be responsible for collecting data on elected councillors,

political parties should be responsible for collecting data on party membership and the initial recruitment and selection of candidates.

Other countries such as Germany publish rankings of local councils and political parties. This is a low-cost way of helping to create competition between areas and parties to demonstrate that they reflect and represent the electorate. Rankings also make it easier to identify 'what works' by comparing the different characteristics and activities of representative and less-representative areas.

There needs to be greater transparency from political parties on party membership and the numbers of people coming forward to stand as councillors, particularly women and those from protected groups. We recommend that:

- **Political parties should be responsible for collecting and publishing data on the representation of women and protected groups in relation to party membership, and the initial recruitment and selection of candidates for local government. Local councils should be responsible for collecting data on elected councillors, which could be achieved by amending section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 to include local government, as recommended by the Fawcett Society.**
- **Rankings of local councils and political parties should be published with this improved data to demonstrate how well they reflect and represent the electorate. These could be based on those published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Germany which have been found to encourage learning about what works in different areas.**

Women make up just 38 per cent of Labour party members and only 36 per cent of Conservative party members. As a result, fewer women and more men develop the connections and knowledge needed to become a local councillor. Many factors influencing women to become members will be down to tone and positioning – areas where clear improvements are needed by all political parties.

Frequently, our interviewees commented that their initial entry into local politics was the result of being involved in a particular local issue motivating them to become more vocal and to attend meetings. One explained that it was only through doing this that the local party began to talk to her taking on a more formal, elected role.

By changing the way they carry out outreach, political parties can improve their chances of recruiting women, for example by finding common cause with campaigning and community groups and reaching out to school sixth forms and universities. Women's groups within political parties can also play a key role, but commitment from party leadership is fundamental, as the success of the Conservative party's 'Women2Win' campaign demonstrates.

We find that to reach a 50:50 gender balance in local government, 3028 more women councillors need to be elected – an increase of over 50%. This means that over 12,000 women need to come forward and apply for council positions if over 3000 are to be successfully elected. In the past 20 years the proportion of women councillors has grown by 5 percentage points, at this rate it will take another 68 years to reach 50/50 representation. We therefore recommend that:

- **Political parties should come together to set a target for 2025 of encouraging 12,000 more women to come forward for selection as a local councillor, with the overall goal that over 3000 are successfully elected. This should be combined with internal reviews of local party processes for attracting and recruiting candidates to ensure they are as transparent, open and fair as possible.**

As part of this, political parties that require prospective candidates to be party members for a certain time period (12 consecutive months for the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties) should consider relaxing these rules, in order to encourage women who may not normally associate themselves with party politics to stand.

Getting more women selected, elected and into leadership roles

The '50:50 Parliament' campaign and its 'Ask Her to Stand' initiative aim to recruit more women into national politics. However, there is a gap for a similar cross-party campaign focussed on encouraging women to run for local politics. The most successful international schemes were typically non-politically affiliated, and run as either national networks or individual or networked local chapters with specific local goals for an increase in candidates. We recommend that:

- **To support the goal of encouraging 12,000 more women to come forward for councillor positions by 2025, an ambitious**

'Ask Her to Stand' initiative for local government should be introduced. This could be coordinated by an existing national pressure group and run through existing local non-governmental organisations.

The Local Government Association (LGA) should support the development of this initiative through its existing 'Be a Councillor' campaign, which should be targeted more directly at improving the gender balance in local government.

This and the measures set out above should, over time, increase the supply of available female candidates. However, given that 80 per cent of councillors elected in any year are reported to be incumbents, radical change is unlikely without further intervention. While the Labour party uses a form of quotas, and correspondingly has a higher number of female councillors than other parties, other parties have weak gender requirements and are lagging behind. Greater use of quotas could dramatically accelerate the representation of women at the local level. We recommend that:

- **If the recommendations above have not resulted in greater representation of women in local government, legislation should be introduced in the next parliament for political parties to apply a quota of 40 per cent for women in posts in local government. Given the UK's first-past-the-post system, this is most likely to be achieved by parties committing to all-women shortlists in wards and divisions where a councillor is standing down or retiring. Specific measures should also be taken for the most 'winnable' seats to ensure the greatest chances of higher female representation. If and when sufficient numbers of women are coming forward to raise ambitions further this could be increased to 45 or 50 per cent.**

As in the Irish Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act introduced in 2012 (see Appendix), this could also be enforced by political parties being required to surrender a proportion of state funding they receive to run their operations. For example in Ireland this is set at 50% for failing to achieve a 30 per cent quota at the national level.

There is also a gap in England for fast-track empowerment and mentoring programmes for women in local politics such as there are in Germany (the Helene Weber Kolleg scheme and the SDP's 'Leadership academy of social democracy'), Canada (Equal Voice) and Northern Ireland (DemocraShe). The Labour Party has established the Jo Cox Women in Leadership Programme²⁸, but there are few opportunities for women in other political parties. There is compelling evidence across a range of sectors for the value of mentoring and development schemes in

28 See <http://www.labour.org.uk/pages/the-jo-cox-women-in-leadership-programme>

enabling women to rise up into senior positions. In other countries these schemes are often run on a cross-party basis and have ongoing institutional support from government to ensure their continuity and success. We therefore recommend that:

- **The responsibilities of the Minister for Women and Equalities in the UK should include improving the political representation of women in both local and national government. As part of this the Minister should work in partnership with political parties to establish a cross-party scheme to provide coaching and mentoring for promising female councillors in England, working in partnership with political parties to set this up. This should be as part of a brief to monitor progress towards more equal gender representation in local and national politics in the UK.**

Achieving a better gender balance in the leadership of local authorities and new devolved institutions

The measures above are aimed at improving the pipeline of women councillors into local government and into leadership roles. However while this could be expected to result in changes to the leadership of local authorities and combined authority boards over the next 10-15 years and beyond, more immediate measures will be needed to address the lack of women at the top of these institutions in the short-term.

To reform the structure of combined authorities we recommend that:

- **Most mayoral and non-mayoral combined authorities have a deputy chair alongside a chair (mayor or appointed leader) on combined authority boards. In order to ensure a more equal gender balance among the leadership of new and existing combined authorities, the deputy chair role should become a mandatory role for combined authorities and these two top positions should be filled by a man and a woman. The deputy chair role should be nominated from combined authority cabinet members, local authority leaders and local authority cabinet members, and elected by the chair and combined authority members. In Mayoral combined authorities this could be also be nominated from the deputy mayor(s).**

Where needed to address gender imbalances, this change could be led by Mayors, or the leadership of new and existing combined authorities and written into their constitutions. However if this does not happen across the majority of these institutions, legislation should be introduced in the next parliament for this to become a legally required position.

Where possible these changes should be locally led, by members of local councils, combined authorities and political parties, for change to be as meaningful and sustainable as possible. However where this does not happen there is a case for legislation to be introduced. We therefore recommend that:

- **Both existing and newly constituting combined authority boards should voluntarily sign up to a commitment that no gender should be represented by less than 45 per cent of representatives with full voting rights and membership, to be achieved within eight years. Political parties should sign up to the same commitment for cabinet members and across the leadership of councils.**

Combined authority boards need to take into account a range of factors other than gender balance when constituting their boards, including achieving balanced geographical representation. They therefore need a range of options at their disposal for achieving greater gender balance, which is a process that must be locally led if it is to be workable and sustainable.

We therefore put forward the following options for combined authorities to achieve the 45 per cent commitment:

- appointing female council leaders or, where there are none available, a leader nominating a female representative from their council and giving them delegated authority to represent and take decisions on behalf of their authority – this would be done on a rotating basis until there are enough female leaders that this is no longer necessary
- combined authority members indirectly elected by council leaders and cabinet members with a rotating all-women shortlist, increasing over time to reach 45 per cent
- appointing additional members to ensure that each of the main policy portfolios is represented (portfolios vary significantly around the country, but largely conform to the areas of finance, regeneration and business, health, social care and culture, with health, social care and culture being under-represented on combined authority boards) – these additional members could be drawn from across the constituent local authority cabinet members or senior councillors. This would increase the number of positions that could then be filled by female councillors to increase representation.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, it is clear what will lead to real change. None of the countries that are ahead of the UK in terms of gender balance in local or national government has achieved this without positive action, generally in the form of quotas. At the level of national politics, for which far more data is available, it is only countries that have gender quotas in place that rank among the top 10 in terms of parliamentary gender equality.²⁹ Even Afghanistan – one of the most dangerous countries in the world in which to be born a woman – has implemented quotas: 50 per cent of the Afghan president's appointees to the country's upper house must be women. This is why, at 53rd position, the country ranks only five below the UK. Given the slow pace of change in achieving better female representation in local government, all-women shortlists are, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, 'the worst form of positive action, except for all the others'.

29 These include Rwanda (at first position), Iceland, Senegal, Sweden, Bolivia and Ecuador.

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APPENDIX: INITIATIVES TO INCREASE WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In our research, we identified a number of initiatives that aim to support women's representation in various countries. We have included these here for information.

CANADA

Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) began taking a leadership role in increasing women's representation in government in 2002. The FCM set up a taskforce on issues for Canadian women in municipal government, overseeing a workshop, in 2002, which led to a research project on women's participation in decision-making at the municipal level. The project conducted surveys on how women's participation could be increased and spoke to women in dedicated research sites on how they might become more actively involved. The findings and a corresponding resource kit were published in 2009 in a report entitled *Increasing women's participation in municipal decision making: Strategies for more inclusive Canadian communities*.

The second stage of the taskforce's work was a mobilisation tour and a series of 10 workshops. The tour aimed to increase support for women's equal participation in politics using the media as a medium to raise awareness and by the construction of local networks for change. The workshops asked participants to highlight the barriers to women's participation and figure out options for overcoming these barriers. The workshop resulted in a 2006 FCM report entitled *Getting to 30% by 2026*, which provided a community mobilisation plan with tips and strategies for municipal councils seeking to encourage women to get involved in local government. As part of the Getting to 30% programme, a series of webinars was produced to provide remote training for women with an interest in local government participation. The FCM's standing committee for increasing women's participation in municipal government was established in 2005, and has drawn up resource tools to encourage and assist women running for municipal office, published in 2009 as *Election toolkit for women: The candidate's guide to municipal elections*.

In 2008 the committee launched a 'Regional Champions' campaign, which built a national network of regional champions to work within their communities to recruit, encourage, support and mentor women who are interested in entering politics. The FCM provides resource materials, promotes the campaign in the media and coordinates the exchange of information between the groups of champions.

The activities of the FCM are applicable to the UK. A similar federation with the correct support could engage in similar activities, replicating the process of the FCM with an initial research project followed by activities to deal with the barriers highlighted in the research, involving nationwide initiatives. FCM as an organisation is ideal for the work of increasing gender equality in local government, as it is nationwide and not limited to any specific region. It provides

uniform approaches and sets up programmes that are initiated in pilot areas before producing reports, guides and toolkits that allow the programmes to be replicated on a national scale by local interested people or FCM organisations. The programmes would allow young British women to engage in politics with the guide of experienced female politicians, with the advantage of any women or area being able to participate if the interest exists through a model that allows the replication of programmes. The funding for FCM programmes comes from the Canadian minister of status of women.

*Protégé Program*³⁰

The Protégé Program engages young Canadian women from the ages of 18 to 28 who have an interest in a career in politics. The programme is centred on shadowing and mentoring from an elected official. Through this, expertise, knowledge and skills are passed down from elected local government officials to aspiring ones. After the programme, the young women are encouraged to run for municipal positions and to become more involved in local issues in order to increase their interest and capacity for serving on municipal governments.

Head Start for Young Women

The Head Start for Young Women programme was designed as a response to the variety of barriers faced by young women who are seeking to participate in local government in Canada and was based on supporting young women and municipal councillors to work together to create more space for young women in local government. The programme was initiated in 2013 as an 18-month programme, during which young women developed their leadership skills and carried out strategies to overcome barriers to entry. Women with experience in local government guided the participants to get organised and choose the right course of action for making decisions. The programme also produced a guide for creating a Head Start Group in a local municipality. The guide includes a toolkit that describes tools and specific methods to start and strengthen a Head Start Group through group building, analysis, planning and effective facilitation; see Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2015) *Removing the barriers to young women's participation in local government: A guidebook to creating a Head Start Group for Young Women*. The programme also facilitated networking opportunities with female leaders in government and community-based organisations, allowing a productive, cooperative relationship between the groups. The programme enabled the participants to apply their talents to the work of Head Start projects.

Equal Voice

Equal Voice is a multi-partisan, non-profit, non-governmental organisation whose mission is to promote the election of women in Canadian politics. It was established in 2001 and significantly targets political parties to be proactive and supportive in their recruitment of women. Equal Voice works via 'chapters'. To establish these, the groups must adopt a multi-partisan approach and be devoted to the cause of more women in political representation. University chapters can also be established along with regional ones. Besides its regular work, the organisation adopts specific programmes and campaigns such as the 'Be Her or Support Her' campaign, which has the aim of increasing female candidates or pushing people to support other female candidates. The campaign allows individuals to act as a group with their local Equal Voice chapter, or to take individual action by just supporting female candidates. Alternatively, individuals can engage in action via a political party such as running for election, donating

30 For more on the Protégé Program, see <http://www.fcm.ca/home/programs/women-in-local-government/past-programs/prot%C3%A9g%C3%A9-program-htm>

money, helping to fundraise for female politician campaigns and celebrating existing female candidates.

Like the FCM programmes, Equal Voice also has its own national mentorship programme called 'Equal Voice Experiences' for women aged 12 to 25 to learn about politics and how they might become involved in political decision-making. The Canada Challenge in May 2009 saw Equal Voice target political parties to commit to more female nominees running for their parties. Equal Voice successfully secured the commitment of five federal party leaders.

The 'Getting to the Gate' programme was an online-based school for women interested in running for public office. The school provided them with training in political campaigning in addition to various practical tools to assist them.

Equal Voice can be applied to the UK. In addition to the various gender equality non-governmental organisations in the UK, such an organisation with a model that allows chapters to be opened nationwide and in student communities would greatly assist in mobilising supporters for gender equality to place soft pressure on political parties to embrace more female nominees. Student communities are particularly proactive on the issue of gender equality and such an organisation that links them with non-student groups under a common aim would allow the gender equality drive from universities to be diffused outwards.

Ask Her

Ask Her is an organisation in Calgary that seeks to increase the representation of women in local government, in particular in the Calgary city council elections. It has a specific aim of having 20 women run for councillor positions in the 2017 municipal elections to ensure a more equal distribution of power between genders in the council. Being more locally based and having more direct aims, Ask Her endorses specific female candidates who are running for a municipal position. The organisation is small and self-funded. Nonetheless, it has been able to successfully outreach to Calgary via media exposure and presence at community events. It has also been able to assist candidates in their campaign funding through Ask Her fundraisers.

The organisation has been successful in encouraging female candidates to stand for election, yet it has not reached its target of 20 candidates yet and functions as a one-dimensional organisation with a single aim in the 2017 Calgary municipal elections. Ask Her is a good example of what a small group of activists can achieve with a dedicated spirit and local, realistic goals. With more funding, Ask Her could develop into an organisation that seeks to improve Calgary's political gender imbalance through multiple methods, targeting multiple audiences.

In 2015, the Liberal party of Canada ran its own 'Invite a Woman to Run' campaign, where advice and assistance would be given to nominated female candidates to run as a representative of the Liberal party. This was part of prime minister Justin Trudeau's family-oriented and gender-equal approach to politics.

THE US

She Should Run

In the United States, She Should Run is a non-affiliated organisation with a mission to expand the number of women elected to office. The organisation inspires women to run for office by presenting a case for why public service matters. Its equivalent of the Canadian 'Invite Her to Run' initiative is the 'Ask a Women to Run' initiative, which provides a community that 'encourages women to run and then connects women with resources, people and organisations who

can help start their path towards public service'.³¹ This aim is assisted by the 'She Should Run Incubator', which provides online assistance and guidance for women seeking public leadership. The programme has been very successful, with 100,000 women having been encouraged to consider standing for election through the programme. The organisation is also regularly covered by the media and interest has 'ballooned' following the election of president Trump, with the expectation of 400 members in 2016 being overwhelmed with 5,500 membership sign-ups.³² The organisation has been described as a 'jump starter' for women's political careers.³³

The success of the organisation and of its close partnerships with American businesses has enabled it to conduct research into women's involvement in politics. This has included a study of how sexism and sexist language can impact voters' likelihood of voting for a female candidate and their feelings on women seeking office. Other studies have included research into women's political campaigns and female voters' financial power and choices in regards to political fundraising.

VoteRunLead

VoteRunLead (VRL) is a similar initiative in the United States that supports the aspirations of women via a nationwide tour of seminars, workshops and accompanying webinars. In 2017 it launched the 'Run As You Are' campaign, which encourages people to nominate ideal female candidates for office who would be contacted by VRL and provided with a three-part online seminar series, a community of like-minded women and the necessary tools to consider a career as a political representative. In Run As You Are, the training will help to identify transferable skills that women possess that can be adapted to political environments. Furthermore, the training will encourage them to take 30 political actions in 90 days to assist in the growth of their political network and relationships within their community. The programme includes the development of a campaign plan that takes into account pre-existing commitments of the women.³⁴ VRL has helped approximately 7,000 women to train to run for office since the general election in 2016, with 60 per cent of workshop attendees stating that they would run for office in the next three years. The founder and chief executive has described VRL as a 'political training powerhouse', emphasising the assistance that VRL can provide for potential electoral candidates. VRL has numerous success stories in assisting women's campaigns, including Ilhan Omar, the first Somali-American legislator elected to office in the United States.

THE UK

The Parliament Project

The Parliament Project was launched in 2016 to encourage and support women into all levels of politics. The project runs information events and training with existing politicians and experts, promotes research into gender and politics, and will soon offer a peer networking service.³⁵ The project also distributes postcards that people can use to encourage women to stand for elected office, at the

31 For more information, see the She Should Run website: <http://www.sheshouldrun.org/mission>

32 See Mann M (2017) 'Why they run – South Orange-Maplewood women discuss running for office', The Village Green, 25 May 2017. <http://villagegreennj.com/towns/government/south-orange-maplewood-women-discuss-running-office/>; Neal B (2017) '10 organizations that empower women you need to know about', Bustle, 19 May 2017. <https://www.bustle.com/p/10-organizations-that-empower-women-you-need-to-know-about-57661>

33 See Lourgos AL (2017) 'More women exploring political careers after Trump's election', *Chicago Tribune*, 7 April 2017. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-women-running-for-office-met-20170407-story.html>

34 For more information on the 'Run As You Are' campaign, see <https://voterunlead.org/2017/04/run-as-you-are-a-call-to-women-to-see-public-office/>

35 See www.parliamentproject.co.uk

national, regional or local levels. Recipients of the postcards will then receive information about events and training.

'50:50' is a cross-party campaign to encourage women's political engagement, with the aim of equal gender representation in government. It launched the 'Ask Her to Stand' campaign to directly try to improve the gender imbalance in parliament via encouraging appropriate female candidates.³⁶ 50:50 had specific contacts for the major political parties to allow women who decide to stand for election to contact them and receive training and mentoring programmes as prospective parliamentary candidates. Ask Her to Stand was launched with the support of MPs from across the political spectrum. 50:50 works with the Parliament Project in providing women with workshops and training to equip them to run for being an MP. The Parliament Project has an e-card page on its website that allows someone to let their friend know that they believe they are ideal for political office. The Parliament Project focuses more on skills-building events and events that encourage women's representation whereas 50:50 is more activist in its nature.

DemocraShe – Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has one of the lowest representation rates of women in politics in the UK at just 30%.³⁷ As a result, activists in Northern Ireland have developed initiatives such as DemocraShe to encourage more women into politics. DemocraShe was a six-week intensive programme established in 2000, which included modules on communication, profile building, policy development, media and information technology skills, speech writing and strategies for selection and election. The programme was tailored to different political parties and practical classes involved women learning how to write a press release, conduct television interviews or move forward within their party. The programme also included strategic long-term planning on the role of women in the Northern Ireland assembly in addition to bringing together women from across the political parties who would usually only meet at party conferences and other such events. The programme involved academics, tutors and specialist trainers and had childcare provision as well as a combination of residential, evening and Saturday classes. The programme had the aim of redressing the gender imbalance in Northern Ireland politics. Participants compiled their own politics, policy and media toolkit, which they used to attain Open College Network learning credits, in addition to feeling empowered and prepared to run for a government position. The programme trained 102 women from all parties in the first election cycle beginning in 2000. All of these women went on to become politically active, 31 of them ran for office, 15 of them were elected and three MPs were elected to Westminster.

The success of DemocraShe has led to the development of similar programmes for Northern Ireland such as the 2016 Women in Public Life Programme and the 2017 Women in Politics Programme, which has similar goals and utilises a similar model, along with the creation of an Assembly Women's Caucus.

The work of DemocraShe and its successor programmes such as Women in Politics is already a UK-based programme, yet there are no cross-party programmes like it in Westminster or the other devolved nations. It is a dynamic and innovative programme that brings women across political parties together where they can work in their respective roles to advance women's equality in politics through self-improvement and a common network. Its success is particularly significant given that it includes representation from all political parties in Northern Ireland, from across the political and sectarian divide.

36 For more on 50:50 and its Ask Her to Stand Campaign, see <http://www.5050parliament.co.uk/askhertostand/>

37 See Roberts D (2016) 'Women and the 2017 assembly election in Northern Ireland'. <http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/happ/FileStore/Fileupload,749991,en.pdf>

Young Female Leaders Academy – Northern Ireland

The Young Female Leaders Academy in Northern Ireland aimed to inspire young women to enter careers in politics and create awareness of the value and need for women in politics. It had over 100 young women attend from 14 schools and colleges. It had speakers from prominent backgrounds presenting their case for why young women should consider careers in politics. This was followed by ice-breaker exercises and activities to strengthen leadership skills.

Politicians from parties across the political spectrum gave speeches and had a debate on their party positions on gender equality. Participants then engaged in an activity to develop their own private members bill to shape future policy with the help of the political guests. The legislations the teams developed varied yet all addressed gender equality and how to improve it via legislature changes. The policies developed were discussed with guests from government who work on issues around the topic of gender equality. The academy session was closed, with women from major corporations and high levels of government stressing the importance of change and challenging gender stereotypes. All participants and guests wrote pledges stating what action they would take to support gender equality.

The academy could certainly be replicated across the UK on a larger scale. With proper funding, a programme could be set up that replicates the academy and conducts it across the UK in different regions every week, inviting schools, local politicians, MPs and other prominent guests to engage with the young women.

The Republic of Ireland

In July 2012 the Irish parliament, Dáil Éireann, passed the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act. The act includes a candidate selection provision which incentivises political parties to select at least 30 per cent female candidates and at least 30 per cent male candidates. If not, political parties surrender 50 per cent of the state funding they receive to run their operations. The threshold will increase to 40 per cent from 2023 onwards.

The act was adopted in response to Ireland's poor record on women's political representation. Up to and including the 2011 general election, the proportion of women in Dáil Éireann never exceeded 16 per cent. This was despite significant socio-cultural change over the past thirty years and the presence of a proportional electoral system, factors usually associated with facilitating women's representation.

The introduction of gender quotas for the 2016 general election saw a significant improvement on the low levels of female candidacy associated with previous electoral contests. A total of 551 candidates contested the election – 388 men (70.4 per cent) and 163 women (29.6 per cent). This was the highest number and proportion of women to ever contest a general election in Ireland and represented a 90 per cent increase on the number of female candidates who contested the previous general election in 2011.

Despite reservations about where they would 'find' female candidates, a review of candidacy rates across the political parties show that all parties surpassed the 30 per cent threshold. Left-leaning parties were more likely to run higher proportions of female candidates than those on the centre right. The number and proportion of women standing as independent candidates also increased, suggesting that the discourse surrounding gender quotas and women in politics may have had a diffusion effect, encouraging women outside of party politics to put themselves forward as independents.

A review of the candidate selection conventions across the four main political parties of Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and Labour shows that out of a total of 155 selection conventions of which 54 were contested, just eleven gender directives were issued. In addition, 20 women were added-on by party headquarters (as were 14 men). Thus, the majority of female party candidates came through convention without the use of a gender directive. The main achievement of gender quotas was that it instilled a cultural change within political parties whereby political parties embraced gendered recruitment processes, encouraging and equipping women to put themselves forward for election.

Adapted from *The 2016 Irish election demonstrated how gender quotas can shift the balance on female representation* by Fiona Buckley <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/03/16/the-2016-irish-election-demonstrated-how-gender-quotas-can-shift-the-balance-on-female-representation/>

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