

Representation of Women in Local Government

Purpose

For information.

Summary

2018 is the centenary of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, which gave women over 30 the right to vote. The upcoming anniversary is an opportune moment to reflect on the current state of diversity in the sector.

It is important that local government reflects the communities that it represents. However, women are currently under-represented in local government politics. The LGA's most recent census of councillors found that around two-thirds (67.3 per cent) of councillors were male and only one-third were female (31.7 per cent).

This paper gives an overview of the LGA's work to identify barriers to women entering politics, encourage more women to stand, and support for preparations to celebrate the anniversary of women's suffrage.

Recommendation

That the LGA Executive note the update.

Action

Officers to take forward as directed by members.

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Representation of Women in Local Government

Introduction

1. Women are currently under-represented as local government politicians. In the [Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013](#), around two-thirds (67.3 per cent) of councillors in England were male and only one-third were female (31.7 per cent). This proportion has remained largely static over many years.
2. In terms of local leadership, just 12.3 per cent of local authority leaders in England are women (2014), compared to 16.6 per cent ten years earlier.¹ In 2017, 30 per cent of English MPs, 35 per cent of MSPs, 28 per cent of Northern Ireland Assembly Members and 42 per cent of Welsh Assembly Members were women. However, while this puts national government at a comparable level to local government, national government has seen a increases in women's representation in each successive election whereas the proportionate representation in local government has remained largely static. This suggests that more can be done to support more women to stand for election, although the final choice as to who to elect remains with the electorate of the local area.
3. However, compared to the national picture, women are over-represented in the local government workforce, with 76 per cent of staff being female.² This is mainly because a large proportion of local government employment is in education and social care, which are jobs in which women have traditionally predominated, but local government also offers a wide range of flexible and part-time opportunities that can be fitted around other responsibilities. Women are well-represented at senior levels in local government. When considering the top five per cent of earners in each council, the median proportion who are women is 45 per cent.³

Building the evidence base

National Census of Councillors

4. The LGA has traditionally conducted a survey of councillors which provides the most comprehensive 'snapshot' of local government representation and analysis of trends over time. It asks councillors about their council work, their views on a range of issues and their personal background. The census ensures that the LGA has accurate information about councillors to enable officers to provide them with the best possible support. Accurate data of this nature aids central and local government and political parties in the development of strategies and policies. The LGA will be conducting another census for 2017/2018, which will be distributed electronically.

¹ IPPR Research

² ONS's Quarterly Public Sector Earnings Survey Q2 2015, published by the LGA in 2015.

³ Local Government Workforce Survey 2016/17

The Fawcett Society Commission on local government

5. The Fawcett Society is currently running a [commission on local government](#) which is looking particularly at under representation of women as councillors and in senior officer roles. The commission published an [interim report](#) in April, which reinforced the findings of the LGA census. A survey of councillors carried out as part of the report also found reports of sexism and structural barriers. The final report is expected to be published in Summer 2017.

IPPR Research: Devolution, Local Government and Gender Representation

6. In 2016, the City Regions Board agreed to support the Institute for Public Policy Research in undertaking a research project examining gender representation in local government as devolution progresses. The research looks to identify barriers women face becoming and progressing as councillors, as well as learning the lessons of other devolved political systems internationally to understand what works in promoting better gender representation. The final report, due in summer 2017, will focus on practical suggestions and recommendations to overcome these barriers; including practices to recruit and retain female politicians.

LGA activity

Be a Councillor Campaign

7. The '[Be a Councillor](#)' campaign works with councils, political parties, individuals and talent-spotters to encourage more people to stand as a local councillor. In 2017-18, it will have a particular emphasis on encouraging underrepresented groups to stand for election, including women.
8. Work includes offering a range of materials and tools that can be tailored to bespoke local campaigns, taking into account factors such as the culture, society and geography of specific areas. Events are also held to identify and contribute to reducing the barriers faced by individuals considering standing for election, publicising the role of the local elected representative and increasing and diversifying the pool of candidates from which the electorate choose.
9. Current work includes co-hosting an event with the Parliamentary Outreach team during Local Democracy Week (12 October), and presenting at the Parliament 5050 conference in December. An event aimed at women is also planned as part of the London 2018 Be a Councillor Campaign. This will focus on the role of a local councillor, hearing from current councillors, a guest speaker and practical advice for women who are thinking about getting into local political leadership.
10. Officers are also working with partners to link local councillors up with young people (particularly focusing on young women), to educate on how local government works and

promoting the role of councillor as an interesting vocation: this includes creating a toolkit to be used by youth groups and in schools.

11. Officers are also assisting political parties to identify prospective female councillors and mentor them to the point of election (and potentially beyond) to help build skills and confidence towards becoming council leaders. This will include a 'Spotlight on her' campaign, which will showcase case studies of women councillors, similar to the campaign run on International Women's day, but with a permanent slot on the website. We are also considering a database of women councillors who could act as mentors or speak candidly with women interested in standing for election.

Women's Local Government Society and suffrage celebrations

12. To mark the anniversary of the 1918 Representation of the People Act which gave women over 30 the right to vote, the Women's Local Government Society (WLGS) is working to deliver the project ['From Suffrage to Citizenship'](#). The project aims to acknowledge those pioneers who worked to gain the opportunity for women to participate in democracy by uncovering the achievements of those who both fought for the Representation of the People Act 1918 and then went on to participate in the opportunities it created. The focus of the campaign is to identify and celebrate the lives of 100 pioneers who were active in the campaign for votes. The campaign will leave a legacy through its influence in inspiring more women to engage in politics.
13. The WLGS is working with Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC), the LGA, the National Association of Civic Officers (NACO), Vote100 and The Fawcett Society to deliver this. The LGA Chairman has agreed to act as one of the project's patrons.
14. The project launched on 8 March (International Women's Day) and will focus initially on raising awareness and gathering nominations for the 100 pioneers. From January to June 2018, the WLGS will support local projects to celebrate and commemorate their pioneer through research, displays, celebrations, discussions and events, whilst encouraging a new generation of women councillors and activists as part of the project's legacy. In June 2018, local areas will submit their projects, from which a selection of ten local commemorations will be made for a national focus.
15. The LGA is supporting the project in a number of ways:
 - 15.1. media and communications support, including coverage in first magazine
 - 15.2. support to encourage councillors to become local member champions for the project
 - 15.3. a stand at the LGA annual conference
 - 15.4. raising awareness by tabling parliamentary questions in the House of Lords.

Further opportunities

16. In the Spring Budget, the then Government announced a £5 million fund to celebrate 100 years of voting rights for women. This would sit with the Government Equalities Office

and LGA officers met with them to discuss early plans for the funding. Officers will follow up with civil servants after the election result to identify whether this funding is likely to continue to be available, and if so how councils and the LGA might make best use of any opportunities to access it.

Financial implications

17. All work is currently undertaken using existing budgets.

Implications for Wales

18. The WLGA runs a 'Be a councillor' campaign for Welsh authorities.