

Commenced: 12.07pm  
Concluded: 13.20pm

## Gender Representation Task Group 5 February 2020

Present: Councillors Eldret, A Holmes and Skelton

### 1/19 Election of the Chair

Councillor A Holmes nominated Councillor Eldret to serve as Chair; Councillor Skelton seconded the nomination.

**Resolved that Councillor Eldret serve as Chair for the remainder of the 2019/20 municipal year.**

Councillor Eldret took the chair at this point.

### 2/19 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

### 3/19 Terms of Reference and Membership

Members considered the remit of the Task Group, following a motion unanimously approved by Council at the meeting of 20 September 2017.

It was noted that a Women's Representation Task Group had originally been set up in response to this motion. Councillor Eldret informed the Group that there had since been an administration change and that the Women's Representation Task Group had subsequently fizzled out. Councillor Eldret informed the Group that previously there had been a cross-party consensus on some aspects of the Fawcett Report.

### 4/19 Minute Extract, Corporate Services Scrutiny Review Board, 2 October 2019

Councillor Eldret informed the Group that through discussions at the Leaders Group and with the previous Chief Executive it had been decided that a Gender Representation Task Group would be formed. Councillor Eldret informed the group that due to there only being one female member of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Review Board, forming a sub-group of that Board had not been considered appropriate. It was noted that it had been agreed that the Gender Representation Task Group, with nominations from each party, be formed instead.

### 5/19 Summary Report of the Local Government Commission

Members considered a Summary Report of the Local Government Commission, titled 'Does Local Government Work for Women?' The report demonstrated that women were dramatically underrepresented in local authorities, both as elected members and as senior officers.

Comparative figures collated for Derby City Council were also considered. It was noted that 68 per cent of council employees were women, which was broadly reflective of national trends within local government.

Councillor Eldret stated that all Members of the Group would like to see measures put in place to increase the number of female councillors. Councillor A Holmes informed the group that although she agreed with some of the reports suggestions, others went too far, to the extent that they could be viewed as sexist. Councillor Skelton commented that she could not agree with imposing term limits on councillors. Councillor Eldret stated that the Group could not influence term limits even if they wanted to. Councillor Eldret suggested that the group considered each recommendation in the report individually, and on the basis of whether it was something the Group could influence.

It was agreed that the Group could influence a review of reasonable adjustment policies for disabled councillors, ensuring disabled women were not disadvantaged by a reliance on inaccessible public engagement methods.

It was agreed that the Group could challenge racism and support BAME and Muslim women, who may otherwise be discouraged from participation in public life.

It was agreed that the Group could influence a review of Dependent Carers' Allowance schemes so that all care costs were covered.

It was agreed that the Group could influence the introduction of separate reporting for Dependent Carers' Allowance, to ensure women were not discouraged from claiming support to which they were entitled.

It was agreed that the Group could influence a review of standards procedures to include suspension and deselection of councillors who sexually harass colleagues, staff or the public. Councillor Eldret commented that she found it surprising that there was no reference to the Equality Act in the Council's current standards procedures. Councillor Skelton agreed that there was no explicit reference. Councillor A Holmes commented that sexual harassment meant different things to different people. Councillor A Holmes informed Members that different people had different levels of tolerance and that what constituted as sexual harassment for one person could be viewed as insignificant behaviour by another. Councillor Eldret informed Members that the Equality Act stated that if behaviour was unwanted, then it was inappropriate. Councillor Skelton stated that context was important when considering this issue. Councillor A Holmes agreed and stated that some people were naturally tactile, whilst others hated being touched.

It was agreed that the Group could influence the establishment of a formal role to oversee member conduct and promote equality.

The Group debated whether or not they could influence the adoption of a requirement for gender balanced leadership, including 50 per cent of Cabinet positions and

Committee Chairs. Councillor Skelton stated that positive discrimination was illegal in the UK. Councillor Eldret commented that All Women Shortlists were legal. Councillors Eldret and Skelton discussed how underrepresented groups, such as women, could be guaranteed interviews when they applied for jobs. Councillor A Holmes stated that not all female councillors wanted to be Cabinet Members or Committee Chairs. Councillor A Holmes informed Members that she was hesitant about becoming a Chair at first and that women should not be forced into taking positions of leadership in order to meet quotas.

Councillor Eldret commented that in order to gain a gender balance in leadership roles, it was necessary to increase the number of female councillors and that All Women Shortlists were a good way of achieving this. Councillor Skelton commented that party processes could also act as a hindrance to increasing the number of female candidates and councillors. Councillor Eldret stated that there were Political Party barriers but there were also internal Council barriers that needed to be overcome. Members noted that in order to encourage more women from all Parties to stand, internal barriers needed to be broken down.

Councillor Eldret informed Members that the Labour Group were attempting to make sure that Motions to Council were either proposed or seconded by a female councillor. Councillor Eldret stated that it was important for women to see other women in senior roles. It was noted that Croydon Council had a system whereby at least one of the two deputy leaders had to be a woman. Councillor Eldret asked that Democratic Services investigate whether a requirement for gender balanced leadership, including 50 per cent of Cabinet positions and Committee Chairs could be done constitutionally. Councillor A Holmes commented that the gender makeup of Political Parties had to be considered. Councillor Skelton stated that regardless of gender, an individual had to be right for the role they were given.

It was agreed that the Group could influence the introduction of assistant or deputy Cabinet Member roles, so that women could develop skills and knowledge to take on leadership positions. Councillor Eldret stated that the Labour Group had previously considered this idea.

It was agreed that senior roles were already open to flexible working as this was standard practice at Derby City Council.

It was agreed that the Group could not influence introducing equal representation of women across combined authorities and permitting all-women shortlists for metro mayor elections.

**Resolved:**

- **That Democratic Services would investigate whether a requirement for gender balanced leadership, including 50 per cent of Cabinet positions and Committee Chairs could be done constitutionally.**

## 6/19 Agreement of future actions

Councillor A Holmes stated that for her, the most important task was to encourage more female candidates to stand for election. It was noted that some women felt that

the political environment was too hostile for them to want to become a councillor. Councillor Eldret commented that she had spoken with women who had decided not to stand due to the aggressive atmosphere in the political sphere and their desire not to be part of this. Councillor Eldret stated that evening meetings and the lack of parental leave also discouraged women from becoming councillors. It was noted that the previous Chief Executive had circulated a draft policy on parental leave.

Councillor Eldret stated that for most women, the Basic Allowance was not high enough for them to just be a councillor. Councillor Skelton suggested that allowances could be considered at the Council's next AGM. Councillor Eldret stated that the Council could make a similar commitment to that taken by MPs, whereby the IRPs recommendations were automatically implemented. Councillor Skelton commented that the last recommendation of the IRP, to increase the Basic Allowance by £2,000, had not been implemented. Councillor Skelton stated that it would make sense for the Basic Allowance to be brought in line with minimum wage or the living wage. Councillor A Holmes commented that being a good councillor took up as much time and effort as a full time job. Councillor Eldret commented that banks did not recognise councillors' allowances when considering mortgage applications.

Councillor Eldret stated that approximately 40 councils had adopted a Parental Leave Policy and that if the Council could implement a policy like this it would be a big first step. Councillor A Holmes commented that it was difficult for young women to become councillors and that they needed to be given opportunities. Councillor Skelton questioned whether an age limit could be introduced for councillors. Councillor A Holmes commented that it wasn't unusual for companies to set age limits, at which people had to retire. Councillor Eldret commented that it was common for female councillors to stand down after one or two terms whereas male councillors tended to serve for much longer periods. Councillor A Holmes stated that despite the need to recruit young councillors, many older councillors still did their job well. Councillor Eldret commented that the only way to get more women councillors was for current male councillors to make way for them.

Councillor Skelton informed Members that the current allowances scheme indirectly discriminated against women, particularly in regard to the removal of councillors pensions. Councillor Skelton commented that the Council could make this view known to the Government. Councillor Eldret informed Members that parental leave was a big issue for prospective female councillors and that claiming for child care made women feel singled out. Councillor Eldret informed Members that councillors couldn't claim carers' allowances for Neighbourhood Board meetings as this was considered 'Ward Duties'. Councillor A Holmes suggested that expenses could possibly be scrapped and the Basic Allowance could be increased.

Councillor Eldret suggested that rather than having expenses, councillors who proved they were carers could receive a top-up to their allowance providing they attended at least 80% of their meetings. Councillor Skelton agreed that targeting this proposed increase towards carers was sensible. Councillor Eldret suggested that including a 'clawback clause' for if a councillor wasn't attending at least 80% of their meetings would ensure this top-up wasn't abused. Councillor A Holmes asked how this could be policed and Councillor Skelton suggested that councillors would have to prove that they had a dependant. Councillor Skelton stated that there was precedent for the Council requiring councillors to agree to a clawback agreement.

Councillor A Holmes informed Members that they needed to bear in mind the public opinion of allowances and expenses for councillors. Councillor Skelton commented that linking Basic Allowances to minimum wage seemed a sensible solution. Councillor Eldret commented that the expenses scandal had tarnished the reputation of all politicians.

Councillor Skelton suggested that the Cabinet System led to an environment of The Cabinet vs other politicians which often led to heated arguments at Full Council. Councillor Skelton suggested that this had the effect of discouraging women from standing to be councillors. Councillor A Holmes commented that Committee Systems led to more work for most councillors and more evening meetings which also had the effect of discouraging women from standing. Councillor Eldret stated that there was a further conversation to be had around the atmosphere at Full Council and how this could be improved. Councillors Skelton and Eldret suggested reintroducing Appointed Panels to give more women an insight into how the Council worked. Councillor A Holmes suggested that a survey could be carried out to engage the public on how they thought the number of female councillors could be increased. Councillor Eldret stated that work could also be done with Community Action in order to increase female engagement in local politics.

**Resolved to recommend:**

- **Putting together a programme to encourage more women to stand for all Political Parties.**
- **Increasing the Basic Allowance for councillors, so that it matched the annual salary of people earning minimum wage.**
- **An annual 'lump sum' for councillors who care for dependants be made available, subject to these councillors attending 80% of meetings.**
- **That the Council writes to the Government to recommend that pensions for councillors be reintroduced.**
- **That the Council adopts a Parental and Carers Leave Policy.**

7/19                      Any other business

It was noted that Democratic Services would schedule the next meeting of the Gender Representation Task Group after an update had been provided to the Corporate Services Scrutiny Review Board on 12 March 2020.

**Resolved that the next meeting would be arranged for March or April 2020.**

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