

SCRUTINY
17 OCTOBER 2022

UPDATE ON RECCOMENDATIONS FROM SCRUTINY SPOTLIGHT REVIEW – DOES LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORK FOR WOMEN

Responsible Officer: Maria De Leburne, Monitoring Officer

Reason for Report: to update the Scrutiny Committee on progress with recommendations made in the Scrutiny Spotlight Review ‘Does Local Government Work for Women’.

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee is asked to note the information below.

Financial Implications: No financial risk.

Budget and Policy Framework: This report sits within the current budget and policy framework.

Legal Implications: No legal implications.

Risk Assessment: Enabling the right conditions to be in place to allow a diverse range of candidates to be empowered and supported to stand for election in the District, and to ensure those candidates are supported once elected, is vital to the effectiveness of the Council.

Equality Impact Assessment: Research published in September 2021 by the Fawcett Society showed that just 34% of the 4,980 councillors elected in May 2021 were women. Following the May 2021 elections, the total number of female members in MDDC was 24%, a decrease on the May 2019 elections after which 26% of members elected were women. Currently 9 of the MDDC 42 Members of Council are women.

Ensuring that councils are truly representative of our communities is a key challenge for local government. The LGA toolkit ‘Enabling and Supporting Women, Parents and Carers to Stand and Serve in Local Government’ stresses that the equal participation of women and men in local politics, as our elected councillors and as our leaders, is an important condition for effective democracy and good governance. Representative councils are best able to speak to, and for, their communities and to support the effective business of local government. Once elected, councillors need to be able to fulfil their duties, and be supported, regardless of gender or circumstances.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: This work is in addition to the Corporate Plan.

Impact on Climate Change: No climate change issues highlighted in this report.

1.0 Introduction/Background

1.1 The purpose of this report is to give an update on how the organisation has advanced recommendations made by the Scrutiny Spotlight Review ‘Does Local Government Work for Women’.

- 1.2 The report presented to Scrutiny in March 2022 made eight recommendations, and called for group leaders of political parties to take action in two further areas. The eight recommendations, and the two 'actions' are updated below. Each of the group leaders at MDDC were asked to respond to the two 'actions we call for'.
- 2.0 **Recommendation 1: That the Council considers ways to better promote the role of a Councillor.**
- 2.1 The Council is currently considering outreach work for prospective candidates in the run up to the District and Parish elections in May 2023. The Council plans to hold online information sessions (either live via Microsoft Teams or Zoom, at different times of the day, and/or pre-recorded) for people interested in standing as a candidate. This should enable people who may not otherwise be able to attend a specific day or evening session to explore and find out information about the role of a Councillor. The Council will look to do this in January/February 2023 in time for candidate nominations in March.
- 2.2 Alongside this, officers will work closely with the communications team to develop promotional material on the role of a Councillor.
- 3.0 **Recommendation 2: That all Chairs of Committees and PDGs are required to attend formal training.**
- 3.1 As per the constitution, Members of PDGs and Committees are expected to obtain necessary skills to carry out the role and work with officers in obtaining further specialist training where necessary. Chairs of Committees and PDGs are offered training on chairing skills. In addition to this offer, Member Services plan to develop training material, a 'Chairing Skills Guide', to be given to all Chairs and Vice Chairs of Committees and PDGs. This will be developed in time for the new council term.
- 3.2 The LGA have published a guide to Chairing Skills which will also be provided to all Chairs, and Vice Chairs of Committees and PDGs.
- 4.0 **Recommendation 3: That a councillor is identified to be the equalities and accessibility champion.**
- 4.1 This will be picked up by the Equality Forum. The newly appointed Corporate Manager for Performance and Risk will facilitate the Forum and ensure this work is taken forward.
- 5.0 **Recommendation 4: That the Council develops a mentoring scheme for (new) members of the Council.**
- 5.1 Member Services plans to develop a list of Members who would be willing to mentor a new Member of the Council. Mentors will be expected to share experience and knowledge of council functions and culture, offer help and advice if needed, and provide networking opportunities with other Members if required. Member Services aim to have this available for the new intake of Members in May 2023.

- 6.0 **Recommendation 5: That the Council supports and facilitates the building of councillor networks, in particular between women councillors and councillors with families or caring responsibilities to grow peer to peer support.**
- 6.1 This work will be picked up by the Equality Forum. The newly appointed Corporate Manager for Performance and Risk will facilitate the Forum and ensure this work is taken forward.
- 7.0 **Recommendation 6: That the Council develops a (password protected) private members area on the Council website, in order to create a bank of shared training materials and documents for reference and ongoing learning.**
- 7.1 ICT and Member Services are currently developing a secure, shared channel for Members which should be available late Autumn 2022.
- 8.0 **Recommendation 7: That the Council ensures all officer roles are offered flexibly (unless there is a business need) and give consideration to the option and promotion of job shares for officers.**
- 8.1 Mid Devon District Council is a flexible employer and, where possible, offer roles on a full or part time basis, as well as being open to job shares. This is, however, shaped by the responsibilities of each post and how it is carried out.
- 9.0 **Recommendation 8: That further research is carried out into member experience of equality in the Council.**
- 9.1 This work will be picked up by the Equality Forum. The newly appointed Corporate Manager for Performance and Risk will facilitate the Forum and ensure this work is taken forward.
- 10.0 **Action 1: Leadership from the top of the political group is important. Group Leaders should be clear on their role regarding member development and conduct and actively encourage members to attend training and briefings.**
- 10.1 *Response from Cllr Bob Deed, Leader of the Council and Leader of the Independent Group:* I can confirm that I do and always have, encouraged all of my Group and others to attend all opportunities to further their personal training including Member Briefings. Member Services, in May 2019 (and I am sure for Members who have been elected subsequently) provided the most comprehensive training programme for Members. This has been the pattern since 2007 when I first joined the Council.
- 10.2 *Response from Cllr Clive Eginton, Leader of the Conservative Group:* As Group Leader, I encourage Members to attend all member briefings, but it often depends on the subject matter and interest of individual members. I would push any new Chair to attend training on Charing Skills, and would support a change to the constitution making it a requirement for all Chairs.

- 10.3 With regards to conduct, there is an important role for Group Leaders with regards to conduct of their members. In my role, I will take immediate action if there are conduct issues.
- 11.0 **Action 2: Political parties should work with the LGA political officers to understand best practice and what actions can be taken to encourage a diverse range of candidates to stand.**
- 11.1 *Response from Cllr Bob Deed, Leader of the Council and Leader of the Independent Group:* The second part I entirely agree with. However, in practical terms, it is hard enough to get any members of the public to stand, let alone have the benefit of having a list of candidates based on "a broad range" to stand.
- 11.2 *Response from Cllr Clive Eginton, Leader of the Conservative Group:* Ideally there would be a 50:50 split between male and female candidates. But at the end of the day it is down to the electorate on who gets elected. Currently within the Conservative party we have 6 female members and 12 male members.

Contact for more Information: Clare Robathan, Policy and Research Officer

Circulation of the Report: Cabinet Member for the Working Environment and Support Services.