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Women's Voices in the Council Chamber



On behalf of the Cork City Council Women's Caucus



Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí
Cork City Council



JULY 2022

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

SPC	Strategic Policy Committee
CPG	Corporate Policy Group
AILG	Association of Irish Local Government
UN	United Nations
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
RDC	Rural District Council
UDC	Urban District Council
FG	Fine Gael
FF	Fianna Fáil
LP	Labour Party
SF	Sinn Féin
AAA	Anti-Austerity Alliance
SPBP	Solidarity – People Before Profit
GP	Green Party
WP	Workers’ Party
CPI	Communist Party of Ireland
HRRA	Housing Rights and Reform Alliance
SD	Social Democrats
NP	Non-Party
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
LAMA	Local Authority Members’ Association

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Section 1

Women in Politics: A Global Perspective

‘There cannot be true democracy unless women’s voices are heard’
- Hillary Clinton

Unfortunately, it will come as little surprise that women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making worldwide, and achieving gender parity in political life remains an elusive target. As of September 2021, data from the United Nations (UN) shows that just 10 countries have a woman Head of State, and 13 countries have a woman Head of Government (1).

Only 21 per cent of government ministers worldwide are women and the tendency has been to allocate them portfolios in areas such as family, social affairs, children, youth, disabled, and women affairs/gender equality. Women comprise 25 per cent of members in national parliaments and, at the current rate of progress, the UN estimates that gender parity in national legislative bodies will not be achieved before 2063.

With regards to sub-national government, data from 133 countries shows that women constitute 36 per cent of elected members in local deliberative chambers. In Europe, data from 2019 collated by the EU’s Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), demonstrated that 29 per cent of local councillors were women – Iceland led the way with 47 per cent (2). According to the CEMR report, there are four countries today in Europe that can boast 40 per cent or more women elected at the local level: Iceland, France, Ukraine, and France. In 2008, there were only three: Ukraine, Latvia, and Sweden.



Data gathered by the European Parliament in 2019 – Women in Politics:
Local and European Trends

While the number of women elected as local councillors is a good indicator of the degree to which women's opinions are represented in the day-to-day life of their jurisdictions, the number elected as mayors is 'a noteworthy gauge of their making inroads as leaders, occupying positions of political power, making policy and wielding influence' (3). There is a disparity in this regard, i.e. the proportion of women mayors remains a great deal lower than that of women elected to councils. While women account for 29 per cent of local councillors in Europe, only 15 per cent of European mayors are women. In terms of proportions, the CEMR report noted that only two countries had fewer women mayors in 2019 than in 2008: Ireland, which dropped from 20.2 per cent to 14.5 per cent, and the United Kingdom, where the share of women mayors decreased from 19.7 per cent to 18.8 per cent (4). However, in a system like in Ireland, where mayors are elected annually, the situation can change quickly. Eight women were elected as mayors or cathaoirleach in June 2022, across the 31 local authorities (25.8 per cent) – Councillors Mary Hanafin (Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown), Caroline Conroy (Dublin City), Emma Murphy (South Dublin), Thomasina Connell (Laois), Clodagh Higgins (Galway City), Ita Reynolds Flynn (Leitrim), Deirdre Forde (Cork City), and Maura Bell (Wexford).

Two European counties had fewer women mayors in 2019, compared to 2008 – Ireland and the United Kingdom. The biggest drop was in Ireland which went from 20.2 per cent in 2008 to 14.5 per cent in 2019. However, at the end of June 2022, Ireland had eight women mayors (25.8 per cent).

A report in 2021 by the World Economic Forum asserted that more than 135 years will be needed for countries to close the gender gap across four measured sectors – political empowerment, economic participation, education, and health (5). The sector with the greatest gap to bridge is the political one.

Globally in 2021, the country which was perceived as the most gender equal was the Netherlands, followed by Sweden, Denmark, Canada and Norway. The top scorers, based on perception, have high rates of women represented in politics, relative to the rest of the world, and some, particularly in the Nordic region, have been leaders in gender equality for decades. How is it that some countries have more success in achieving gender parity in politics than others?

There are many factors at play here, but – simply put – some countries are better at promoting women’s representation in politics than others. This may be linked to a country’s history, governmental model and, crucially, electoral system. For example, Professor Shirley Graham, George Washington University, has consistently argued that the U.S. two-party system does not help minorities gain access to political power (6).

In a seminal 2017 article, Mirya Holman made the same claim about U.S. local government and concluded: ‘The continued lack of parity at local level signals comprehensive issues with the health of local democracy. Local politics are often dominated by white elites; women’s lack of representation is further evidence of the unequal access to power’ (7).

According to a study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a correlation exists between a country’s electoral system and high levels of female political representation (8). In Western European countries where 20 per cent or more of the seats in parliament were held by women, all had a proportional electoral system, where ‘political groups receive seats in proportion to their electoral strength’. Worldwide, the study found that of all the countries with women making up 30 per cent or more of parliament, none operated under a majoritarian system.

Of course, electoral systems are only one factor. Gender quotas have proven to be an effective mechanism to increase women’s political representation - ‘Countries with well-designed gender quotas and varying measures designed to ensure that women constitute a certain portion of political positions, elect significantly more women’ (9).

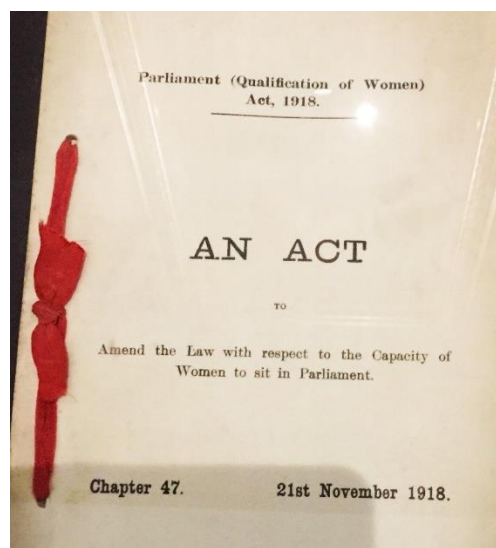
People may feel uncomfortable about quotas, but research evidence proves they work, albeit, with varying rates of effectiveness, which is associated with factors such as 1) institutional fit with existing election system and candidate selection procedures; 2) the will of the party leaders to support women’s candidacy and; 3) inclusion of additional mechanisms such as placement mandates.

The Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway – which all operate under either a proportional or mixed electoral system – use some form of voluntary quotas set by political parties, or other forms of affirmative action. In Sweden, for example, one party operates a ‘zipper system’, requiring that candidate lists alternate between male and female candidates, while another party ensures that of the four candidates listed at the top of the list, two are women and two are men.

While a variety of gender quota initiatives have been widely adopted across the world and have proven to be effective in increasing women's candidacy and election, they are not necessarily the only solution. Gender quotas should be part of a suite of measures to support and maintain women's candidacy and inclusion in all aspects of public life. According to Professor Shirley Graham, George Washington University 'You can't just pull one lever and make it all ok. It works across all the institutions, all the structures, all the systems and society – we need to be making sure that women have equal access, education, health, workforce, politics, law, etc' (10).

How does Ireland compare?

Section 2 will examine the issue of women in Irish local government specifically, but at a general level, how does Ireland compare? Elaine Loughlin and Aoife Moore (2021) note: 'By the time Dáil Éireann celebrated 100 years in 2019, just 114 women had been elected as TDs. In the same period, around 1,190 men had taken a seat in our national parliament' (11). The first woman elected to Dáil Éireann was Constance Markievicz. Markievicz was one of only two women who stood in the general election of 1918 and the first woman elected to the British House of Commons. Like the other Sinn Féin candidates, she had pledged to abstain from the Westminster Parliament, and so she never took her seat. Instead, she joined the revolutionary Dáil Éireann, becoming the first female TD and the first female Minister in Western Europe (12).



Constance Markievicz was the first woman elected to the Dáil, having won a seat at the general election of December 1918. It was the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 which facilitated women to sit in parliament.

Women are significantly outnumbered by men in Irish national politics. The figures presented above by Loughlin and Moore pre-date the 2020 general election. Following the most recent election, Fiona Buckley (2020) observed that since 1918, 130 women have been elected to Dáil Éireann, in comparison to 1,211 men. This breaks down as 90 per cent men and 10 per cent women in our national parliament in 102 years. Despite this depressingly low average, the representation of women at national level has been increasing.

The 2020 general election saw 162 women contest for seats across 39 constituencies. In total, there were 519 candidates running for 159 seats, so women constituted 31.2 per cent. These figures compare favourably with the previous general election in 2016, when women made up 163 of the 551 candidates, just under 30 per cent.

History was made at the 2020 general election in Ireland. This was the first time in which every constituency fielded a woman candidate.

The 30 per cent threshold in terms of women candidates is significant. In 2012, legislation was passed which obliges political parties to select at least 30 per cent women candidates and 30 per cent men candidates to contest general elections. If the quota is not met, political parties will lose 50 per cent of the State funding they receive on an annual basis to run their operations. The gender quota threshold for candidates rises to 40 per cent from 2023 onwards.

In the twelve general elections prior to the introduction of the gender quota legislation (1973 to 2011), the proportion of women's representation in the Dáil never rose above 15 per cent (12). The general election of 2016 was the first at which the legal gender quotas applied and the change was significant (13).

- Of the 551 candidates, 163 (30 per cent) were women – the highest number and proportion to ever contest an Irish general election.
- The number of women candidates represented a 90 per cent increase compared to the previous general election in 2011.
- All political parties met, or exceeded, the 30 per cent quota.
- There was a 40 per cent increase in the number of women elected

Women Elected to Dáil Éireann, 1918-2020

Dáil	Year	Women Elected	% of Women Elected
1 st	1918	1/105	1.0
2 nd	1921	6/128	4.7
3 rd	1922	2/128	1.6
4 th	1923	5/153	3.3
5 th	1927	4/153	2.6
6 th	1927	1/153	0.7
7 th	1932	2/153	1.3
8 th	1933	3/153	2.0
9 th	1937	2/138	1.4
10 th	1938	3/138	2.2
11 th	1943	3/138	2.2
12 th	1944	4/138	2.9
13 th	1948	5/147	3.4
14 th	1951	5/147	3.4
15 th	1954	5/147	3.4
16 th	1957	4/147	2.7
17 th	1961	3/144	2.1
18 th	1965	5/144	3.5
19 th	1969	3/144	2.1
20 th	1973	4/144	2.8
21 st	1977	6/148	4.1
22 nd	1981	11/166	6.6
23 rd	1982	8/166	4.8
24 th	1982	14/166	8.4
25 th	1987	14/166	8.4
26 th	1989	13/166	7.8
27 th	1992	20/166	12.0
28 th	1997	20/166	12.0
29 th	2002	22/166	13.3
30 th	2007	22/166	13.3
31 st	2011	25/166	15.1
32 nd	2016	35/158	22.2
33 rd	2020	36/160	22.5

While noteworthy improvements were seen in 2016, the situation stagnated somewhat at the 2020 general election. All the main political parties met the 30 per cent threshold, but in minimalist fashion (14). Michael Gallagher (2020) pointedly notes: ‘The main parties continue to comply with the letter of the legislation, but it is open to question whether they are complying with its spirit’ (15).

General Election 2020

Party	Total Candidates	Women Candidates	% of Women Candidates
Fianna Fáil	84	26	31.0
Fine Gael	82	25	30.5
Sinn Féin	42	14	33.3
Green Party	39	16	41.0
Labour Party	31	10	32.3
Solidarity-PBP	37	15	40.5
Social Dems	20	11	55.0
Others	68	21	30.9
Non-Party	128	24	18.8
Total	531	162	30.5

Fiona Buckley and Yvonne Galligan (2020) argue that 2020 could be regarded as a ‘consolidation’ election for the gender quota legislation – ‘With just 22.5 per cent of the seats in Dáil Éireann occupied by women, the legislative gender quota should be viewed as the start rather than the culmination of efforts to support women’s candidacy and election’ (16).

The fact remains that Ireland currently ranks 98th in the world (as of July 2022) for women’s representation in national parliaments, falling behind countries such as China and Iraq.

Section 2

Women in Irish Local Government

‘The role of women in Irish local government has been largely unexplored’

- **Professor Mary E. Daly, ‘Women and 120 Years of Local Government’,
National Women’s Council of Ireland, commemorative booklet, 2019**

Like national politics, local government in Ireland has historically been male-dominated and there is some distance to travel before a critical mass of women councillors is achieved. The Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898 – which effectively introduced modern local government structures in Ireland – stated that the electorate for local elections consisted of ‘all Parliamentary electors and all peers and women who, but for being peers or women, would be entitled to be Parliamentary electors’. Though female suffrage was limited, it is telling that women were included as a feature of the new local electorate (1). The number of local electors in 1899, when the first elections were held, was 891,000, approximately 35 per cent of the total adult population. Under the terms of the 1898 legislation, each registered voter was to have one vote, with elections to take place every three years using the simple majority voting system.

One of the most revolutionary aspects of the elections of 1899 was that women had the right to vote for the first time and to stand for district councils. Thirty-one women were elected to Rural District Councils (RDCs) in 1899. Four women were elected to Urban District Councils (UDCs). Though women could become Poor Law guardians and district councillors, they were debarred from contesting County Council elections until the Local Authorities (Ireland) (Qualification of Women) Act, 1911.

On foot of the 1911 legislation, the first woman elected to Dublin Corporation was Sarah Cecilia Harrison (her self-portrait hangs in Dublin City Gallery, the Hugh Lane). She was followed by Martha J. Williams in 1915 (2). It was 1939 before Dublin had its first female Lord Mayor – Kathleen Clarke. A confirmed nationalist and founder member of Cumann na mBan, she was first elected to Dublin Corporation in 1919.



Local Authorities (Ireland) (Qualification of Women) Act, 1911

(1 & 2 Geo. 5.) CHAPTER 35.

An Act to enable Women to be elected and act as Members of County and Borough Councils in Ireland.

[16th December 1911]

Be it enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 Women to be eligible as county or borough councillors or aldermen in Ireland.

(1) A woman shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage for being elected or chosen or being a councillor of the council of any county or borough or an alderman of the council of any borough:

Provided that a woman, if elected or chosen as chairman of a county council or mayor of a borough, shall not, by virtue of holding or having held that office, be a justice of the peace.

(2) Subsection (1) and the words 'other than a borough' in subsection (2) of Article 12 of the schedule to the Local Government (Application of Enactments) Order, 1898, are hereby repealed.

2 Short title.

2. This Act shall apply to Ireland only and may be cited as the Local Authorities (Ireland) (Qualification of Women) Act, 1911.

The pivotal Local Authorities (Ireland) (Qualification of Women) Act, 1911 which stated: 'A woman shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage for being elected or chosen or being a councillor of the council of any county or borough'.

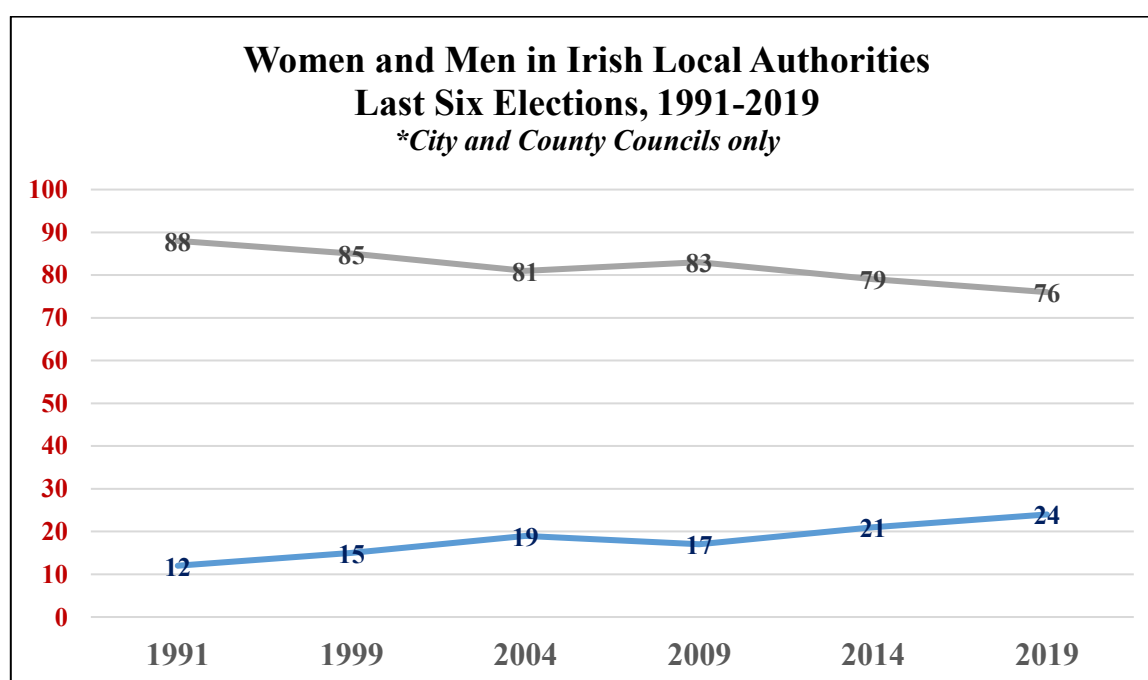
Fiona Buckley and Caroline Hofman (2015) note that despite the early achievements for women in Irish local government from the period of 1898 to 1911, 'the social conservatism that pervaded Irish political culture and society for much of the twentieth century resulted in social and legal barriers for women accessing work outside the home and entering into public life' (3). Generally, local authorities have been cold chambers for women, even though the trend is upwards for the representation of women.

Taking the last six cycles of local elections for City and County Councils – and noting that the 1996 local elections did not take place until 1999 – the representation of women in our councils has risen from 12 per cent in 1991 to 24 per cent in 2019.

Women Elected to Irish City and County Councils, 1991-2019

YEAR	% OF WOMEN
1991	12
1999	15
2004	19
2009	17
2014	21
2019	24

To put this in concrete terms, the 2019 local elections saw women take 226 out of the available 949 seats. The number of women seeking local authority seats in 2019 rose significantly from 2014. Approximately 650 women candidates (29 per cent) were on the ballot papers, compared to 440 (22 per cent) five years earlier. Women's membership of the 31 local authorities is now at 24 per cent and the trend is upwards. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council almost became the first ever local authority in the State to have a fifty-fifty split of men and women in its council chamber (4). Women won 19 seats out of 40 and they were joined by Mary Fayne who was co-opted in October 2019. Of the 11 Solidarity – People Before Profit councillors seven (64 per cent) are women. The only other party to have more women elected than men is the Social Democrats, at almost 53 per cent (9 of 17).



Despite small progress being made, it remains the case that only one out of four councillors in Ireland is a woman. The gender quota legislation of 2012 (see Section 1) only applies at national level and it has not been extended to the local government arena (5). In the aftermath of the 2019 local elections, the *Women for Election* group argued that the Government could be doing more to address gender inequality in Irish local government and it launched a €35,000 crowdfunding plan to help women candidates in future elections. The group's then chief executive, Ciairín de Buis, described the local elections as a missed opportunity to improve gender balance in Irish politics and called for the gender quota legislation to be extended to the local government arena. She added: 'Despite the increase to 24 per cent in the number of council seats taken by women, we're disappointed that it fell short of a quarter of all council seats. While it represents the highest number of council seats held by women in the history of the State, it just proves how slow our political system has been to respond to changes in society as a whole' (6).

Data from the last six cycles of local elections in Ireland suggests that there is no electoral bias against women – the problem is that not enough women are appearing on the election ballot papers. It is worth noting that the main political parties put in place informal gender quotas for the last two local elections, in 2014 and 2019. Time will tell if this has a positive impact on the actual numbers of women elected, but there is some cause for optimism that the national gender quota legislation is promoting greater levels of women's participation at the local level too.

There is a logic to the political parties using local elections to recruit, train, promote and run women with a view to having them 'election-ready' for the next general election. Given the personalism and localism inherent in Irish politics, local government experience is particularly critical to one's chances of selection for general election. Developing a local political base and gaining the necessary experience at local government level are very important in terms of being viewed as a credible candidate for national parliamentary elections. Research by Fiona Buckley, Mack Mariani, Claire McGing, and Timothy White (2015) indicates that this is especially true for women who are statistically more likely than men to win a national seat if they have already served at local level (7).

Data from the last six cycles of local elections in Ireland suggests that there is no electoral bias against women – the problem is that not enough women are appearing on the election ballot papers.

There are other factors to consider as well. Future opportunities for women's electoral success at the local level will be shaped – for better or worse – by local government reform plans. For example, the Local Government Reform Act, 2014 reduced the number of local councils in Ireland by 73 per cent, from 114 to 31, with the complete abolition of Town Councils. The corresponding reduction in council seats was dramatic, with a fall from 1,627 to 949. A decrease in the number of council seats means, of course, fewer opportunities for men and women to gain local government experience. In terms of advancement to the national parliament, this may hurt women more than men because, as mentioned above, local government experience has been found to be a more critical factor for the election of women to parliament (in comparison to men). There were more women at Town Council level than at City or County Council level so the abolition of this entire tier of government removed the most accessible entry point for women into the political sphere.

It is important to point out that more women were elected to Town Councils than to any other level of government in Ireland. Election to one's Town Council was in reach for many people because if one was organised and availed of a network of family and friends one could win a seat with a few hundred votes. Town Councils were a useful entry point into politics for young people generally, women, people from different ethnic backgrounds, people with disabilities and so forth. In removing that political entry point, we have narrowed the pool of people who are willing or able to contest elections for City and County Councils. The result is councils that are dominated by middle aged and elderly grey-haired men who can afford to be full-time local public representatives (8).

Section 3

Women in Cork City Council

‘Politics is particularly difficult for women. Childcare is the big issue’

- Former Lord Mayor of Cork, Mary Shields (1)

Women councillors have made a significant contribution to Cork City Council, despite being heavily under-represented. From 1900 to 2022, there have only been six female Lord Mayors in the city. The first was Jane Dowdall in 1959 and she was followed 30 years later by Chrissie Aherne. In more recent times, Deirdre Clune (2005), Catherine Clancy (2013), Mary Shields (2014) and, currently, Deirdre Forde (2022) have served as Cork’s first citizen. Currently, there are six women in the council, from a total of 31 elected members (19 per cent). Cork city is below the national average of 24 per cent for the representation of women in local government and ranks 17th out of the 31 local authorities (see next page).

Over the last five election cycles, the number of women candidates seeking a seat in City Hall has risen substantially – from 12 per cent of the candidates in 1999 to 29 per cent of the candidates in 2019. However, this is not reflected in electoral success and the current number of women in the council (six) is the same as it was in 2004.

Cork City Council
Last Five Local Elections, 1999-2019

Year	Women Candidates	%	Women Elected	%
1999	9 from 73	12%	4 from 31	13%
2004	13 from 61	21%	6 from 31	19%
2009	10 from 59	17%	6 from 31	19%
2014	12 from 65	18%	5 from 31	16%
2019	24 from 82	29%	6 from 31	19%

In 1999, there were six male candidates for every female candidate – 64 men contested the election, compared to nine women. Twenty years later, the ratio had changed dramatically to 2.4:1 – i.e. 58 men and 24 women.

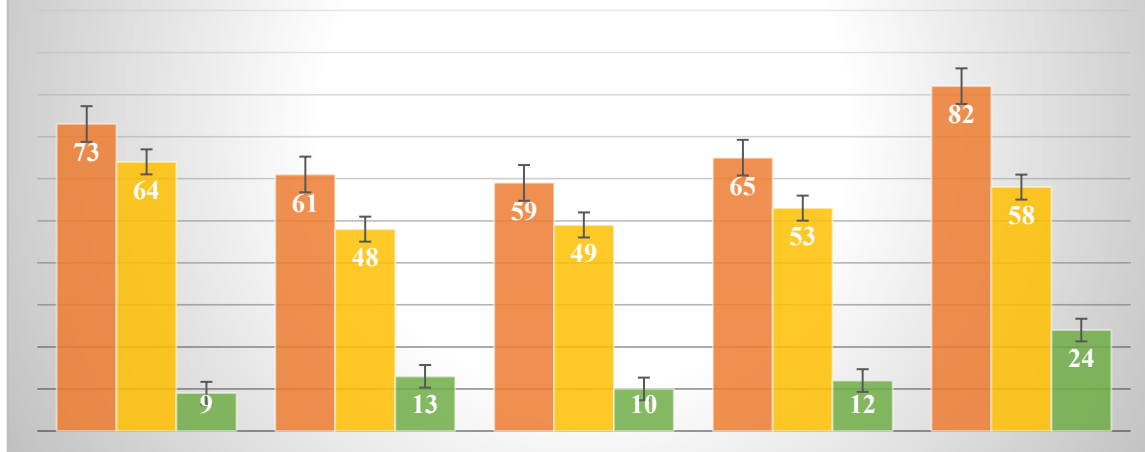
Ranking of Local Councils for the Representation of Women

	Local Authority		No. of Women	% of Women
1	Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council		19 from 40	47.50
2	Dublin City Council		26 from 63	41.27
3	Kildare County Council		16 from 40	40.00
4	Wicklow County Council		12 from 32	37.50
5	South Dublin County Council		14 from 40	35.00
6	Meath County Council		13 from 40	32.50
7	Louth County Council		9 from 29	31.03
8	Fingal County Council		11 from 40	27.50
9	Cork County Council		15 from 55	27.27
10	Laois County Council		5 from 19	26.32
11	Cavan County Council		4 from 18	22.22
12	Galway City Council		4 from 18	22.22
13	Leitrim County Council		4 from 18	22.22
14	Limerick City & County Council		8 from 40	20.00
15	Tipperary County Council		8 from 40	20.00
16	Westmeath County Council		4 from 20	20.00
17	Cork City Council		6 from 31	19.35
18	Kerry County Council		6 from 33	18.18
19	Wexford County Council		6 from 34	17.65
20	Kilkenny County Council		4 from 24	16.67
21	Monaghan County Council		3 from 18	16.67
22	Roscommon County Council		3 from 18	16.67
23	Sligo County Council		3 from 18	16.67
24	Galway County Council		6 from 39	15.38
25	Clare County Council		4 from 28	14.29
26	Carlow County Council		2 from 18	11.11
27	Donegal County Council		4 from 37	10.81
28	Offaly County Council		2 from 19	10.53
29	Mayo County Council		2 from 30	6.67
30	Waterford City & County Council		2 from 32	6.25
31	Longford County Council		1 from 18	5.56
			226 from 949	23.81

***This table is based on the results of the 2019 local elections and does not take into account subsequent changes, e.g. resignations and co-options.**

Local Election Candidates Cork City Council, 1999-2019

*** TOTAL CANDIDATES, MEN, WOMEN.**



Taking the last five electoral cycles, a total of 340 candidates have stood for election to Cork City Council – 272 men (80 per cent) and 68 women (20 per cent). Looking at the 29 local electoral areas over these five elections (there were five LEAs in 2019, six at the previous elections), we can see the following:

- On average, women have comprised 20 per cent of the candidates, winning 17 per cent of the seats.
- On three occasions, there has been no woman on the ballot paper: South-Central (1999), North-West (2009), and North-East (2009).
- Seven times a LEA has had no female representation: South-Central and North-West (1999), South-Central and North-West (2004), North-East and North-West (2009), and North-East (2014).
- No woman was elected to the North-West LEA in this period, until Marion O’Sullivan in 2014.
- From these 29 local electoral contests, women have topped the poll on four occasions (14 per cent): Máirín Quill (North-East, 1999), Deirdre Clune (South-East, 2004), Máirín Quill (North-East, 2004), and Lorraine Kingston (South-Central, 2009).

- Since the 1999 local elections, there have been four women Lord Mayors from 24 (17 per cent) – Deirdre Clune (2005), Catherine Clancy (2013), Mary Shields (2014), and Deirdre Forde (2022).

From 1999 to 2019, 17 different women have served on Cork City Council, with Mary Shields and Fiona Kerins sitting in four separate councils. Following the 2019 local elections, four of the six successful women were first-timers, albeit Mary Rose Desmond and Deirdre Forde previously served on Cork County Council.

Mary Shields (4)	1999, 2004, 2009, 2014
Fiona Kerins (4)	2007 (co-opted), 2009, 2014, 2019
Laura McGonigle (3)	2007 (co-opted), 2009, 2014
Deirdre Clune (2)	1999, 2004
Máirín Quill (2)	1999, 2004
Catherine Clancy (2)	2004, 2009
Patricia Gosch (2)	2004, 2009
Lorraine Kingston (2)	2007 (co-opted), 2009
Fiona Ryan (2)	2016 (co-opted), 2019
Kathleen Lynch (1)	1999
Annette Spillane (1)	2004
Marion O’Sullivan (1)	2014
Lil O’Donnell (1)	2014
Lorna Bogue (1)	2019
Mary Rose Desmond (1)	2019
Deirdre Forde (1)	2019
Colette Finn (1)	2019

The political affiliations of the women councillors on Cork City Council are contained on the following page. In the current council, the Green Party had two female councillors elected, though Lorna Bogue subsequently resigned from the party in October 2020 and founded An Rabhartha Glas. Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Sinn Féin and Solidarity-People Before Profit have one woman each on council. It is worth noting that Fianna Fáil – regularly the largest party in City Hall over this period – has not had more than one woman councillor at any time.

Year	Name	Affiliation	Extra
1999	Mary Shields	Fianna Fáil	
1999	Deirdre Clune	Fine Gael	
1999	Máirín Quill	Progressive Dems	
1999	Kathleen Lynch	Labour Party	
2004	Mary Shields	Fianna Fáil	
2004	Deirdre Clune	Fine Gael	Replaced by Laura McGonigle, 2007
2004	Máirín Quill	Progressive Dems	
2004	Annette Spillane	Sinn Féin	
2004	Catherine Clancy	Labour Party	
2004	Patricia Gosch	Fine Gael	
2009	Mary Shields	Fianna Fáil	
2009	Laura McGonigle	Fine Gael	
2009	Lorraine Kingston	Labour Party	
2009	Fiona Kerins	Sinn Féin	
2009	Catherine Clancy	Labour Party	
2009	Patricia Gosch	Fine Gael	
2014	Mary Shields	Fianna Fáil	
2014	Laura McGonigle	Fine Gael	
2014	Fiona Kerins	Sinn Féin	
2014	Marion O'Sullivan	Anti-Austerity Alliance	
2014	Lil O'Donnell	Anti-Austerity Alliance	
2019	Lorna Bogue	Green Party	Now, leader of An Rabhartha Glas
2019	Mary Rose Desmond	Fianna Fáil	
2019	Deirdre Forde	Fine Gael	
2019	Colette Finn	Green Party	
2019	Fiona Kerins	Sinn Féin	
2019	Fiona Ryan	Solidarity - PBP	

- In 2007, Fiona Kerins (SF) replaced the deceased Con O'Connell (Ind).
- In 2007, Lorraine Kingston (LP) replaced Ciarán Lynch (LP – dual mandate).
- In 2016, Fiona Ryan (S-PBP) replaced Mick Barry (S-BPB – dual mandate).

In terms of primary research, this report will focus on the last two councils, as elected in 2014 and 2019. In 2014, five of the twelve women candidates (42 per cent) won seats in City Hall.

Cork City Council Local Elections 2014: Women Candidates

Party or Grouping	No. of Women Candidates	Seats Won	Details
FG	4	1	Laura McGonigle (SE) successful; Patricia Gosch (NC), Sue-Ellen Carroll (NE) and Lyndsey Clarke (NW) unsuccessful.
FF	2	1	Mary Shields (SW) successful; Kate Martin (SE) unsuccessful.
LP	2	0	Catherine Clancy (NC) and Lorraine Kingston (SC) unsuccessful.
SF	1	1	Fiona Kerins (SC) successful.
AAA	2	2	Lil O'Donnell (NC) and Marion O'Sullivan (NW) successful.
NP	1	0	Ella Goddin (SC) unsuccessful.
	12	5	

By 2019, the number of women candidates had doubled to 24, but only six claimed seats (25 per cent).

Cork City Council Local Elections 2019: Women Candidates

Party or Grouping	No. of Women Candidates	Seats Won	Details
FG	4	1	Deirdre Forde (SE) successful; Lorraine O'Neill (NE), Julie O'Leary (NW) and Sinead Ronan (SW) unsuccessful.
FF	1	1	Mary Rose Desmond (SE) successful.
LP	1	0	Ciara Kennedy (SW) unsuccessful.
SF	2	1	Fiona Kerins (SC) successful; Mandy O'Leary Hegarty (NE) unsuccessful.
GP	2	2	Lorna Bogue (SE) and Colette Finn (SW) successful.
S-PBP	3	1	Fiona Ryan (NW) successful; Carol Brogan (NE) and Tjitske De Vries (SW) unsuccessful.
SD	2	0	Sinead Halpin (NE) and Patricia O'Dwyer (SC) unsuccessful.
HRRA	2	0	Martina Murphy (NW) and Shirley Griffin (SW) unsuccessful.
WP	1	0	Catherine Coffey (NW) unsuccessful.
A	2	0	Anna Daly (SE) and Joanne Murphy (SW) unsuccessful.
NP	4	0	Noreen Murphy (NE), Sandra Condon (NW), Suzanne Hegarty (SC), Lekha Menon Margassery (SC) unsuccessful.
	24	6	

Political Parties and Groupings:

Cork City Council Elections, 2014 and 2019

Fine Gael

In 2014, FG ran 14 candidates in total, four of whom were women (29 per cent).

In 2019, FG ran 11 candidates, four of whom were women (36 per cent)

Fianna Fáil

In 2014, FF ran 11 candidates in total, two of whom were women (18 per cent)

In 2019, FF ran 13 candidates in total, one of whom was a woman (8 per cent)

Labour Party

In 2014, LP ran six candidates, two of whom were women (33 per cent)

In 2019, LP ran five candidates, one of whom was a woman (20 per cent)

Sinn Féin

In 2014, SF ran eight candidates, one of whom was a woman (13 per cent)

In 2019, SF ran 10 candidates, two of whom were women (20 per cent)

Solidarity People Before Profit (previously Anti-Austerity Alliance)

In 2014, AAA ran three candidates, two of whom were women (67 per cent)

In 2019, SPBP ran four candidates, three of whom were women (75 per cent)

Green Party

In 2014, GP ran four candidates, none of whom was a woman (0 per cent)

In 2019, GP ran five candidates, two of whom were women (40 per cent)

Workers' Party

In 2014, WP ran two candidates, none of whom was a woman (0 per cent)

In 2019, WP ran two candidates, one of whom was a woman (50 per cent)

Communist Party of Ireland

In 2014, CPI ran one candidate, this candidate was not a woman (0 per cent)

Aontú

In 2019, Aontú ran three candidates, two of whom were women (67 per cent)

Housing Rights and Reform Alliance

In 2019, HRRA ran six candidates, two of whom were women (33 per cent)

Social Democrats

In 2019, SD ran four candidates, two of whom were women (50 per cent)

Non-Party

In 2014, there were 16 NP candidates, one of whom was a woman (6 per cent)

In 2019, there were 19 NP candidates, four of whom were women (21 per cent)

Note: The gender quota law in place for general elections is applied at a national level, i.e. on the total number of candidates a party selects, rather than at constituency level. If the gender quota law is to be extended to local elections, it is also likely that that it would be applied on the total number of candidates a party selects nationally. On this basis, at the 2019 local elections, all parties – with the exceptions of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil – cleared the 30 per cent threshold for selection of women candidates.

2019 Women Candidate Selection in Local Elections

Source: Dr. Fiona Buckley, UCC

Party	% of Women Candidates
People Before Profit	59.2 (n=29)
Social Democrats	55.2 (n=32)
Solidarity – People Before Profit	47.4 (n=9)
Green Party	43.9 (n=36)
Workers' Party	42.9 (n=3)
Labour	40.5 (n=45)
Sinn Féin	33.9 (n=78)
Renua	32.1 (n=9)
Aontú	30.2 (n=16)
Fine Gael	29.0 (n=118)
Fianna Fáil	21.2 (n=88)
Independent/Non-party	19.0 (n=97)
Total	28.3 (n=560)

Another aspect to consider is how the women councillors in Cork City Council fare when it comes to attaining the top political positions in City Hall. We have already seen that only six women have served as Cork's Lord Mayor in over 100 years. Cork City Council has six Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) as follows: -

- Housing
- Environment, Water and Amenity
- Strategic, Economic Development, Enterprise, and Planning
- International Relations and Tourism
- Roads and Transportation
- Community, Culture and Place-making

In spite of the fact that one in five of the councillors is a woman, the six Chairs of the SPCs are men.

Section 4

Methodology and Analysis

Methodology

Letters were issued to all the female candidates who stood for election to Cork City Council in 2014 and 2019. Letters were also sent to each of the male candidates who put themselves forward for election in 2019. Following the responses, focus groups – and in some cases, interviews – were organised. These took place in late May and early June 2022. The focus groups and interviews were conducted in line with the ethical approval received from the Social Research Ethics Committee in University College Cork and were GDPR compliant. Part of this approval guarantees the anonymity of participants. Accordingly, the following coding system is used in the remainder of this section.

F1	Cork City Council Local Election Female Candidate 2019
F2	Cork City Council Local Election Female Candidate 2019
F3	Cork City Council Local Election Female Candidate 2019
F4	Cork City Council Local Election Female Candidate 2019
F5	Current Female Member of Cork City Council
F6	Current Female Member of Cork City Council
F7	Current Female Member of Cork City Council
F8	Current Female Member of Cork City Council
F9	Current Female Member of Cork City Council
M1	Cork City Council Local Election Male Candidate 2019
M2	Cork City Council Local Election Male Candidate 2019
M3	Current Male Member of Cork City Council
M4	Current Male Member of Cork City Council

We are very grateful to the participants who helped with this research. In asking questions, we always stayed true to the core Terms of Reference, as follows: -

- ***To document*** the lived experience of women running for local elected office in Cork City.
- ***To identify*** barriers, challenges and facilitators for women participating in politics and public administration.

- ***To produce a set of recommendations*** for Cork City Council’s executive and elected members to pursue an evolution of practice and policy that would position Cork City Council at the vanguard of equitable provision of opportunity for women to participate at elected levels in the local authority
- ***To identify pathways for further research*** that would add value to local government in Cork City from the point of view of enhancing participation of women and assist in upcoming funding applications.

The Lived Experience

The experience of women running for election to Cork City Council varies considerably. This extends to their motivations to put themselves forward and their journeys to get on the ballot paper. Clearly there is a distinction to be made between those who ran under the banner of a political party (and therefore may have had to come through a convention) and those who ran as Independent candidates.

Deciding to Run

As noted by one participant, the decision to run for election to Cork City Council stemmed from (a) being asked by her political party and (b) from being at a time in her life where childcare responsibilities had decreased.

Like a lot of women, I was asked to run! I had excluded myself over the years, basically because of childcare. It’s a busy job raising children and I think it has been rendered invisible and has been diminished and undervalued. When I was asked to run by my party, my daughter was coming up to doing her Leaving Cert. All of my life, I had been advocating for more women to run for political office, so it was time for me to walk the walk! – F7

The entry route for another participant also came through being approached by a political party. In contrast to F7, she was at a point where she had just finished school and did not yet have major responsibilities. In her own words, she had ‘no excuse’ to say no.

I was campaigning on the ground locally. We were a few months out from the local elections and my party asked me if I would put my name forward. I was young, having just finished my Leaving Cert, so I had no huge responsibilities. You could say I had no excuse! I spoke with my family and friends and they were fully supportive. I was not elected that time but did better than expected so there was a view [in the party] that we could build on it for the next time – F5

Another participant was not asked to run by a political party but opted to go forward so as to ‘challenge power’.

I was 23. Nobody asked me to run! I was finished college, I was unemployed, and I was angry, because the unemployment benefit had been cut for under-25s. I specifically wanted to challenge power. That’s what was influencing my thinking at the time – F6

For F1, the primary motivation came from not seeing people like herself in the council chamber.

I’m from a very working class background and when you look at who is a councillor, I didn’t see people like me there. I didn’t see me in any of those councillors. I didn’t see my friends. I didn’t see my workmates. I wanted to show we could have people like me in City Hall. I got the feeling that some of the councillors were a little bit out of touch with what was happening on the ground – F1

As a migrant, F2 was driven by a very specific reason to go forward and, for her, winning a seat in City Hall was not the priority.

I wanted to run to raise awareness that a migrant can vote and stand in local elections. That was my agenda really. I am a Corkonian since 2008 but I didn’t know I could even vote until the City Council ran a workshop around 2018. I wanted to create an awareness; it was not about winning – F2

Two women candidates in 2019 praised the role played by existing male councillors who helped, advised and guided them – even though in one instance this was likely to cost the councillor some votes as the candidate he was helping was on the ballot paper in his electoral area.

I was a community activist. Where I live is not properly represented on Cork City Council. It is completely neglected. I ran as an Independent and it was an experience! I had no plan. A male member of Cork City Council helped me; we filled out the nomination papers and ran down to City Hall just before the deadline – F4

The importance of mentoring support was also raised by F3.

Going forward, I would love to see a network or mentoring group established to support women who have an interest in politics and who are there to support females as they navigate from an expression of interest through to election. A non-political party group where women can learn the ins and outs of council – F3

For all of the women candidates, there was desire to help their local communities and improve their areas. This did not differ from the motivations expressed by male candidates, as expressed by F1.

My main interest was to bring about change in our communities and in people's lives, to the extent that it is possible. I wanted to address issues that I thought were not being met by Cork City Council – F1

On the Campaign Trail

Running for election, at any level, is not easy. For the men and women who participated in this research, the emotional support and encouragement of family and friends was a key enabler. Without this, many people would simply not be in a position to run. Finance is an important part of the story as well. While those candidates running under the banner of a political party received some support for printing and design work, for the most part candidates are expected to be self-sufficient in terms of fundraising. Independent and Non-Party candidates are very much on their own.

There is a big difference between being a member of a party and being non-party. If you are not in a party, you are reliant on family and friends – M3

The electoral support I received as a candidate in the Cork City local elections of 2019 came mostly from the political party I represent. Support and mentoring were of huge importance to me as I navigated through standing for elections. As a female it can sometimes be quite daunting – F3

The biggest barrier to me in getting elected was to get on the party ticket. There was a lot of internal party politics. Certain people were not happy and tried everything to exclude me – F9

For the women who participated in our study, experiences on the campaign trail differed enormously.

Out on the doors, I have never had problems with constituents. I have very, very infrequently come across people who dismissed me simply because of my gender. I actually think voters tend to be quite enthusiastic about seeing a woman running. The challenges that I have faced have all originated from within the political party I was in and getting my name on the ballot paper – F6

I was motivated when people welcomed me and spent some time listening to me. There were instances when people were not welcoming as they said that they would support only party candidates and also, they were not used to an immigrant coming to ask for votes – F2

Money is the biggest barrier to women getting elected. If you have money, you can buy expertise, you can buy social media – F9

Some women candidates suffered significant abuse and threats on the doorsteps, often linked to gender and family circumstances.

There was a concerted effort by another candidate to discredit me as a suitable candidate. This was not directed at the party I was standing for; it was solely directed at me as a person with young children and other commitments at the time of running – F1

One rival male candidate told people on the doorsteps not to vote for me because I had two small children and wouldn't be able to give the time to being a councillor. That kind of thing is very belittling – F1

On the doors, you would hear comments from people who looked at my leaflet and said 'oh, you were wearing make-up that day, you looked nice'. That has nothing to do with politics. Even more disappointing was that it was coming from other females – F3

The campaign was really hard. I got threatened and my family got threatened. My children were terrified inside my house. It had a terrible effect on me. I wouldn't stand again – F4

I was asked at the doorsteps – 'what does your husband think about you running for election?' and 'what about your children? What ages are they? Who is minding them?' – It was degrading and disrespectful – F3

There is no doubt that male candidates at the 2019 local elections in Cork city also suffered abuse, including personal threats and attacks on the home. However, it appears that the *nature* of the abuse is different for women and tends to be more personalised, based on how they look or comments relating to their husbands/partners or children.

An unfortunate growing trend is abuse via non face-to-face means of communication, i.e. online, mainly through Twitter and Facebook.

The worst part of the election campaign was the online bullying and character assassination, which I believe was purely because I am a woman. It was horrific for my family. The acceptance of that behaviour serves no one in politics – F4

I felt I was quite specifically targeted and there was a gender aspect to it. I had to come off social media for a while. It got very personal, very specific and very image-related – F8

I got sent some awful messages through social media. There were big misogynistic rants in the middle of them – F1

Again, this was not exclusive to women, but two things became apparent across the focus groups and interviews: 1) women speak more about the online abuse they receive; and 2) they receive more of it than men. The examples of misogynistic comments directed at the women participants in this study, often through anonymous social media accounts, demonstrates a resistance to women in public life and betrays a misguided belief among some members of the public, that a public representative/candidate for election should be a man.

Recent research by Dr. Ian Richardson, as published in *Council Review* (May 2022), revealed that female local councillors received eight times as many abusive tweets per followers compared to their male counterparts (1). Interestingly, the research found no significant difference between the number of abusive tweets female TDs received compared to their male counterparts. The net result, as explained in the same issue of *Council Review* by Orla O'Connor, Director of the National Women's Council, is that 'online abuse acts as a barrier for many women who wish to enter public service, but do not run for office or put themselves forward out of fear of abuse.'

MEASURES TO MITIGATE AGAINST RISING LEVELS OF ONLINE ABUSE

With a marked increase in the level of threatening and abusive social media posts and 'hate mail' against female members of the Oireachtas and female councillors in recent times, what measures are in place to help mitigate the effects of such abuse? Report by Deirdre O'Flynn.

A study by NUI Galway in 2020 indicated that almost all (96%) of the interviewees – current and former female members of the Oireachtas, as well as female councillors from all major political parties – had received social media or email messages that used threatening language or 'hate mail'. Three-quarters had been threatened with physical violence via online or social media. Almost two in five reported they had been threatened with sexual violence, with a quarter saying they had been verbally abused in public.

Other respondents admitted to receiving threatening and abusive phone calls at home and on their mobile phone; being worried about their family's safety due to threats on social media; not feeling comfortable attending large public



"Online abuse acts as a barrier for many women who wish to enter public service, but do not run for office or put themselves forward out of fear of abuse," according to Orla O'Connor, Director of the National Women's Council.

A special report in Council Review highlights a marked increase in the level of threatening and abusive social media posts and 'hate mail' against female councillors.

[Council Review \(May 2022\) Special Report on Online Abuse of Women in Politics.pdf](#)

Some women candidates and councillors have developed coping strategies, including blocking people online who have been abusive, refraining from posting or coming off social media, either temporarily or permanently. The latter strategies indicate a consequence of online abuse is the silencing of women.

For some first-time candidates, both men and women, creating awareness amongst the electorate was a big challenge. The effects of incumbency can be debated but, in general, male incumbency was seen as a negative to women's electoral prospects. The benefit of name recognition in a low information election should not be under-estimated. The 2019 local election in Cork was also the first one since a big boundary extension increased the size of the city jurisdiction, which also created challenges.

A big obstacle is trying to engage people to go out and vote. There is a disconnect with some people who believe their vote doesn't count – M3

The main obstacles for me were the new boundary in my ward and being unknown. It was difficult to get my name out to a much bigger population. I also encountered voter apathy and disillusionment. In addition, some people were totally uninformed about the role of a councillor – M2

As a new candidate, creating awareness was an obstacle as some people feel they must know the person before they vote for them – F2

Citizen Education

A recurring theme from the focus groups and interviews was the need for greater education and awareness amongst the public about the local government system, the role of councillors and the powers of local authorities.

This mirrors comments made nearly a century ago when the Lord Mayor of Cork, Councillor Seán French, addressed the 1924 public inquiry into the performance of Cork Corporation. The Lord Mayor recommended - '*A real and serious attempt should be made to educate the citizens in local services and to instil into them an interest in local government bodies and generally in local affairs*'.

Expressing it slightly differently in 2022, F4 noted: ‘*Voter education is needed. So many people don’t understand how the system works. They don’t understand the difference between Cork City Council and a cabbage*’.

We need to get better at voter education and public consultation. Part of the problem is that lip service has been paid to democracy. It’s all well and good wringing our hands and complaining that people don’t vote but if they don’t see the benefit of voting, then why should they vote? – F7

People need to appreciate exactly what the council is about and what it does. The council are the people managing the parks, managing the footpaths, managing the roads and the basic fundamentals which are important to people. Education around the voting system and how it works is also badly needed – M3

An associated issue to education is the degree of understanding that employers have of local government and the demands of being a councillor.

One of the biggest barriers to running for local election is your employment status and concerns from your employer. Your employment can be put at risk by virtue of your council obligations and your attendance at meetings – M1

The need to have a flexible and understanding employer is something that is often not referred to, but is important, when it comes to somebody looking to run for local elected office and serving as a councillor.

In the Chamber

The historic City Hall council chamber can be a cold place for women. This is partly due to the dominance of men in the council since the first local elections of 1899, but can also be reflected today in language used and comments passed.

The chamber is very old fashioned, partly because it is an historic forum. It is also an intimidating forum which doesn't invite different voices. It is a forum where men have to behave in a particular way; I think they are used to behaving in a certain way in a virtually all-male environment. This can be very off-putting to women. It is not a comfortable space for women to be in. It is almost unbeknownst to the men that this happens. If we did have someone from a minority background, they would be equally as intimidated because it is so traditional – almost to the exclusion of other ways of doing things, though I don't think this is necessarily intentional – F7

Local government is a boys' club. I say that with respect for some of the individuals involved, because often they don't even realise it. It's a club in the first instance and then it's predominantly a boys' club. When you come in as a newly elected councillor, you are on the periphery and only told the bare minimum – the crumbs off the edge of the table – F8

It is very difficult for me in the council chamber as a young woman. I have gone through three or four meetings in-a-row where there was always some sort of misogynistic slur said to me. These things were said in public and nobody seems to learn from this. I have been told I was being overly emotional 'for some reason'. At that point I wanted to ask if it was because of my period. That's par for the course and I am used to it happening because the council chamber is a boys' club and they are used to speaking in this way. I wouldn't even say I get the worst of it. I don't know what it would be like if someone who was not white was in the chamber. They would find that incredibly difficult – F6

Until there are more women in the council chamber, things won't change. Bad behaviour in the chamber doesn't get checked often enough, though that is beginning to change now. Play the topic – don't play the person, male or female. If your argument is valid, you don't need to play the person – F8

It is not in my nature to feel intimidated, but in the chamber there is a default misogynistic mindset, even in the nice guys. They don't mean it; it's just the way the boys are – F9

There appears to be informal interactions among men who demonstrate a familiarity with one another and knowledge of the workings of the system. The male network on City Council reflects an *insider* group dynamic. Even though female councillors have won a seat and are inside the council, they sometimes have the status of being an *outsider on the inside*.

This can extend also to dealings with City Council staff and senior officials.

A barrier for me is that I am working full-time and therefore I am not in and around City Hall all of the time. I can send an e-mail and it is easy to ignore me because staff know I am not going to turn up at their office looking for answers. A lot of the time, I don't even get an acknowledgement e-mail. That is a huge barrier for me. Councillors who are there for a long time are on first name terms with staff, they have their mobile numbers and they seem to be able to get stuff done – F5

Senior staff in the council, who are predominantly male, will not take seriously the things that I suggest or ask. I don't get answers. There seems to be a gendered element to that. That's an institutional thing. It doesn't matter whether you are full-time or part-time – F6

Rather than a few figure-heads, there needs to be a critical mass of women in the organisation. I have heard councillors speak in a disrespectful way to the Chief Executive, which they wouldn't do to a male Chief Executive. The male councillors are friendly with one another. They are more critical of the women councillors – F6

In this regard, the establishment of a Women's Caucus in Cork City Council is a positive development which can increase the visibility of women and provide a platform to raise issues.

The Women's Caucus is a good platform for those of us involved in it and it gives us greater visibility. The fact of it existing has somewhat changed the framing of conversations around women in the council chamber. Even on the maternity leave issue, there is no male councillor against it. We just need them to be more pro-active on it, rather than passively supportive – F6

We don't want the Caucus to become a talking shop. We have to make sure that we do not engage in anti-male discussions. It is not about burning men at the stake. What we need to talk about is gender equality and, at the moment, that is about more women – F8

However, not all councillors were initially enthusiastic about the Caucus.

I had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the Women's Caucus. I don't like to see a different arena for women from men. We would be better off trying to have dialogue between 31 councillors. But I do now see a role for a Women's Caucus in discussing particular issues relating to women, like childcare for instance.

Section 5

Recommendations

Not all of the recommendations contained below can be implemented by Cork City Council but the issues can be raised and pushed by the local authority. Two of the recommendations flow from resolutions recently passed by the members of the City Council.

Recommendation 1:

Gender quota legislation (40 per cent at the next General Election) should be extended to local government.

On Monday 9 May 2022, at a regular meeting of Cork City Council, the elected members unanimously resolved (without the need for a vote) that the Chief Executive, Ann Doherty, should write to the Government requesting that a gender quota of 40 per cent be introduced for the 2024 local elections. The motion was tabled by Councillors Colette Finn, Deirdre Forde, Mary Rose Desmond, Mick Nugent and Fiona Kerins. A move in this direction would bring Ireland into step with many other European countries, who apply gender quotas at sub-national level elections to encourage more women into politics, starting at the most accessible level.

Our recommendation endorses and supports the call made in this regard by the **Alliance for Local Quotas** convened by the National Women's Council (https://www.nwci.ie/learn/article/newly_formed_alliance_for_local_quotas_welcomes_establishment_of_electoral), as well as the calls to extend legislative gender quotas to local elections made in recent reports including those by the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality (2021) (1), the Oireachtas Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament (2021) (2) and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2022) (3).

There is broad support for the introduction of quotas amongst the members of Cork City Council – although there is a distinction between men passively supporting the issue and actively progressing it.

I was torn for a long time on quotas but we definitely need to do something to raise the level of female representation – F5

I'm not a greater believer in quotas, but I do understand the need for them at this point
– M4

I'm fine with quotas, but they have to be recognised for what they are – a very blunt instrument. It's embarrassing that they may have to be introduced in the first place but a structural break is needed in order for more women to be selected to run for election. It's silly that we have gender quotas in place for national elections, but not for local. That's exactly the place they should be! If you want women to become TDs, Ministers or MEPs they have to start off at local government and work their way up. Quotas need to apply at the political entry level – local government – F6

We're trying to get more women into the room. When the 2012 legislation was enacted, plenty of academics and commentators said it would not work unless it was in place for local government elections. You need an experienced pipe-line of women at the local level. Otherwise you get women who are less experienced and who are cannon fodder when it comes to 'senior hurling' at the national level – F7

It is clear that gender quotas are not a panacea and they only represent a *part* of the solution. As identified by M3 – *'The political parties have to make sure that they are not just adding in female candidates tokenistically. It happens a lot and we cannot get away from it. If we're genuine about change in the council chamber, we cannot just be tokenistic about it'*.

In a letter to *The Irish Times* on the week that Cork City Council passed the gender quota resolution, Dr. Sandra McAvoy wrote:

Legislating for gender quotas before 2024 would be an important step. It is also a reminder that potential new councillors, political parties, and local groups should be beginning the process of preparation for those elections. It is important that candidates are carefully selected, know exactly what the job involves, and that gender and diverse representation is taken seriously, with no one approached at the last minute simply to fulfil the quota.

Recommendation 2:

Maternity leave should be introduced for local councillors and consideration should also be given to extend paternity leave entitlements. More should be done regarding childcare issues for councillors.

We welcome the announcement on 28 June 2022 by Minister of State, Peter Burke TD, that local councillors will be entitled to maternity leave under measures signed off by the cabinet. Currently, female councillors are regarded as ‘office-holders’ rather than ‘employees’ and are not covered by the statutory framework on issues like maternity leave. Minister Burke has now received approval to proceed with legislation, under which it is expected that councillors will be entitled to take full maternity leave and temporarily appoint another person to their seat while they are absent. If the councillor would prefer administrative support, they can avail of funding of €230 per week to pay someone to assist with secretarial work. The measures will also cover councillors who are absent due to illness.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/a3cdb-minister-burke-announces-scheme-to-provide-maternity-leave-for-councillors/#>

For far too long, female politicians have been denied a basic right of maternity leave as our political system displayed an inherent design bias. As we remove and address more obstacles to increased female participation in local government, we will see more equality of representation in our councils and they can finally become more reflective of the communities that they serve. We see many Oireachtas members starting off their political careers in local government so these measures will also have a positive effect on gender equality in our Dáil and Seanad chambers - Minister of State for Local Government, Peter Burke TD.

The new scheme is welcome as currently, any new parents in council chambers across the country, have returned to their councillor duties and representative roles, much earlier than leave periods available to employees. When announcing the new maternity leave scheme, Minister Peter Burke observed: ‘Previously, I was aware of situations where councillors felt pressure to turn up to important votes or debates, when they needed to be at home caring for a new baby. It is not credible maternity leave if you cannot fully switch off from your work’.

The need for maternity leave has been apparent for quite some time and was highlighted by all of our participants, men and women.

Back around 2003, I went to a National Women's Council conference in Dublin. It was my first time hearing about the 5Cs (Culture, Candidate selection, Cash, Childcare, and Confidence) and the barriers facing women in politics. Nothing has changed in the 19 years since. I feel like a hypocrite now going into schools encouraging young girls to go into politics. There are huge barriers and one of the biggest is maternity leave. It's 2022! If we were talking about any other profession, it wouldn't be tolerated – F5

Childcare supports are also required. Currently, the children of Cork City Council staff can avail of childcare at Oakview Village, located within the City Council civic offices building. Consideration should be given to extending the definition of City Council 'staff' to include elected members.

As part of this recommendation, Cork City Council should also examine its structures and processes to facilitate equality, new patterns of work and work-life balance. This might include hybrid meetings where councillors are not required to be physically present in City Hall.

We need more women in politics and in council chambers but we also need to be aware that, as women are the main caregivers to children, then council meetings and structures needs to work with them. For example, Covid has changed the face of meetings within council as a lot were conducted online. I think it would be a positive move to allow women who cannot be at a council meeting in person to be allowed to join in online, therefore not missing important votes or missing out on speaking on motions – F3

The structure of council and meetings has to change. Equality is something everybody should have. If I'm a father and my children are sick, I should be allowed to stay at home and mind them. Why should that just fall on my wife or partner? We need to have a better understanding of equality – M1

Recommendation 3:

From the three delegates from each local authority that are nominated to the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) there should be at least one woman and one man.

This is a very simple recommendation, which is not difficult to implement. The AILG states: *Once a local election takes place and our 949 local councillors across Ireland are democratically elected, each local authority nominates three of their elected members as delegates to AILG and they remain in place for the full five-year term until the next local elections.*

During the debate on gender quotas which took place in Cork City Council on 9 May 2022, Councillor Garret Kelleher recommended the change whereby each local authority would nominate at least one female councillor and one male councillor. Of course, the AILG – which has recently done a lot on the issue of gender equality – could make this policy change itself but, equally, there is nothing to stop Cork City Council taking the initiative for its members.

Currently, only 16 of the 93 AILG delegates are women. Under this recommendation, that figure would rise to a minimum of 31. This should also lead to an increase of women on the AILG Executive Committee – two out of 12 at present.

<http://ailg.ie/about/meet-the-ailg-officer-board-delegates/>

Gender equality should also be the fore when representatives are being selected for the Local Authority Members' Association (LAMA). Based on the LAMA website - <http://lama.ie/> - only one of the representatives from the 31 local authorities is a woman. There are only men on the LAMA Officer Board (10 members).

***The AILG and LAMA have significant roles to play in promoting greater gender equality in local government.**

Recommendation 4:

The Cork City Council Women's Caucus should be elevated to the status of a Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) which would allow its Chairperson to sit on the Corporate Policy Group (CPG). Cork City Council should also introduce a rule that there is gender balance among SPC Chairs and, at a minimum, there should be at least two women and two men as Chairs of the SPCs.

Cork City Council has six SPCs and the Chairs of these committees sit on the powerful CPG.

- Housing
- Environment, Water and Amenity
- Strategic, Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning
- International Relations and Tourism
- Roads and Transportation
- Community, Culture and Placemaking

No woman councillor chairs an SPC and therefore female representation is lacking on this important body.

The CPG that we have is very pale, male and stale. It is not representative at all of the population of Cork – F6

The divvying up of the SPC Chairs and places was totally disgraceful. It wasn't democratic, it came down to men being men. This 'back-of-the-room' on an envelope approach is too ad-hoc – F9

Winning a seat on Cork City Council is only one part of the equation; another part is being in a position of influence as Lord Mayor, Chair of an SPC or as a member of the CPG.

At the regular meeting of Cork City Council on 13 June 2022, a motion in the name of Councillor Lorna Bogue was discussed. It read:

‘That Cork City Council will write to Minister of State Peter Burke, with responsibility for Local Government and Planning, requesting that he issue a circular to all local authorities constituting Women’s’ Caucuses as SPCs. This will ensure representation on CPGs. Furthermore, that resourcing would be provided for same’.

There was no vote on this motion, which accordingly was passed as a resolution of Cork City Council. If implemented, this would represent a progressive step forward and guarantee female representation on the CPG – effectively the local authority’s cabinet.

Broadening from the issue of women in local government, Cork City Council might also give consideration to including equality as a theme in one of its SPCs.

Why can’t we have an SPC that has equality as an element to it? It could include men in a discussion about diversity, inclusion and barriers. I don’t like the ‘them and us’ approach and these breakaway women’s groups – F9

Recommendation 5:

Cork City Council should develop a community-based educational programme to explain what local government does and the role of the councillor.

This recommendation was raised frequently at focus groups and interviews. In the build-up to the 2019 local elections, Cork City Council’s then Corporate Affairs Directorate did tremendous work in running the ‘Shape Your City’ education programme, aimed at the non-Irish population.

As highlighted earlier in this report, one of our women participants ran for election in 2019 due to her exposure to this education programme.

We strongly believe that a similar programme should be introduced across Cork in 2023, in the lead-up to the local elections the following year, with the aim of increasing awareness and knowledge about local democracy. Based on its earlier programme, Cork City Council is well placed to become a leader in this space.

As well as traditional information sessions through meetings, the council should also consider using local media, videos, vlogs, Twitter, Facebook and TikTok to enhance the exposure to local government and the role of the councillor.

Recommendation 6:

Cork City Council should provide post-election training to all newly elected councillors about council structures, processes, committees, policies and functions. This might also include a specific mentoring programme for newly elected women.

In-house induction training is lacking for new councillors in Cork City Council. While some national training programmes exist through the AILG, Cork City Council can do so much more in this regard. To some extent a ‘sink or swim’ policy pervades which exacerbates the notion of *insider outsiders* (i.e. councillors who have won a seat but who are disadvantaged by the male-dominated existing networks).

Specifically for women councillors, the Women’s Caucus can take the lead in developing a non-political mentoring group to support new councillors and help them learn how Cork City Council operates, at formal and informal levels.

Recommendation 7:

Cork City Council should provide enhanced equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) training for all staff and elected members. Part of this process should involve re-writing Standing Orders in relation to appropriate language and behaviour in the council chamber.

This recommendation is self-explanatory. Training raises awareness by addressing everyday workplace issues surrounding EDI. Many people may be unaware of the unfair treatment or discrimination that their colleagues are facing, or perhaps someone is suffering in silence and does not know how to address the issue.

By staff simply taking a high-quality training course, the common issues that many people face at work are highlighted and learners are advised on how to address these issues. High-quality training helps all employees to see the true value of an inclusive workplace and how to create one.

Further Research

While this research report has focused on gender in relation to Cork City Council elections and the role of the councillor, it is clear that there is scope for further research in a number of areas, including the following: -

Non-Remunerative Supports – The Moorhead Report of 2018 raised issues in this regard but did not necessarily address them sufficiently. In particular, research is needed into what Moorhead described as ‘non-remunerative supports’.

A range of non-remunerative supports are also identified which would assist councillors in preparing them more fully for the role and make the role more sustainable, particularly for individuals with caring, employment or educational commitments. These could include training, capacity building and other supports, improvements in the running of Council meetings, technological supports and administrative assistance.

This issue came up time and time again during our focus groups and interviews.

Not having staffing support is a big problem – F6

The Broader Representative Base in Local Councils – Many groups of people are currently under-represented on Cork City Council, for example, people from ethnic minority groups and people with disabilities. On a number of occasions in our study, participants drew attention to issues negatively affecting women, before adding that it could be even more difficult in the council chamber for people from a minority background. This has to change.

Representation on the Administrative and Professional Sides of the House – While we examined representation through the gender lens when it comes to the political side of local government, there are also issues with the lack of women and other groups of people involved on the administration side. Identifying and examining the barriers and facilitators for women operating within the sphere of public administration in Cork City Council is also vitally important.

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