

## **Achieving Gender Equality in Scottish Local Government**

### **Summary and Recommendations**

This paper sets out what work COSLA has undertaken to promote gender equality across Local Government during 2018. This includes a successful conference for councillors in November 2018, the commitment to provide period products in COSLA offices and to support the provision in schools across Scotland, and our developing work on the Equally Safe agenda. It also summarises the priorities identified for 2019.

This paper invites Convention to:

- i. Note the important work that COSLA has undertaken to promote gender equality across Local Government; and
- ii. Support continued efforts to promote gender equality across Local Government and the work planned for 2019.

### **References**

Previous reports on Gender Equality:

- COSLA Leaders November 2017, Agenda Item 12
- COSLA Leaders August 2018, Agenda Item 14
- COSLA Leaders November 2018, Agenda Item 12
- Communities Board November 2018, Agenda Item 2.2

**Mhoraig Green**  
**Policy Manager**  
**Migration, Population and**  
**Diversity Team**  
**mhoraig@cosla.gov.uk**  
**0131 474 9244**

**Laura Caven**  
**Policy Manager**  
**Migration, Population and**  
**Diversity Team**  
**laura.caven@cosla.gov.uk**  
**0131 474 9317**

**Katie Brown**  
**Equally Safe Policy**  
**Coordinator**  
**Communities Team**  
**katie@cosla.gov.uk**  
**0131 474 9244**

**December 2018**

## **Achieving Gender Equality in Scottish Local Government**

### **Purpose**

1. In November 2017 COSLA Leaders endorsed a paper which set out ambitions to promote equality and diversity across Local Government. This paper sets out what progress has been made on that agenda during 2018 and what work is planned for 2019. Convention will be aware that this work is one of COSLA's Key Priorities.

### **Current COSLA Position**

#### ***Achieving Gender Equality in Scottish Local Government Conference***

2. On 2 November 2018 COSLA President Alison Evison hosted a conference on *Achieving Gender Equality in Scottish Local Government* in Verity House. The aim of the conference was to contribute to building the wider movement that challenges barriers and builds support for the greater participation of women in politics and public life in Scotland. Around eighty people attended the event, the majority of whom were women councillors from across Scotland. They were joined by some supportive men councillors and representatives of key organisations and campaigns such as Engender, Parliament Project and Women 50:50. Feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive.
3. The key themes that emerged from the day were:
  - The need to promote positive messages to women about the benefits of being involved in Local Government and the contribution they can make to their communities.
  - The need to establish mentoring and buddying schemes and a national cross-party Women's Forum to provide peer support to councillors.
  - The need to assess the workload of councillors to ensure it is manageable and to establish whether it realistic to continue to treat it as a part-time role in terms of remuneration.
  - The need to review terms and conditions of councillors including parental leave, personal safety procedures, professional development, flexible working and establish parity with council employees.
  - The need to address the often adversarial culture within council chambers which can make them less than welcoming to women councillors.
  - The need to challenge negative media reporting of women politicians and women in general.
4. During the event participants developed action plans on how barriers to women entering and progressing in Local Government politics can be tackled. Those action plans will be published in 2019 following discussions with the other organisations named in them, including Scottish Government, political parties, trade unions, SOLACE and Improvement Service. There are also opportunities from the conference to progress partnership working with some of the organisations who attended. It is proposed that the new COSLA Special Interest Group on Barriers to Elected Office will be actively involved in the development and implementation of those action plans.

5. Many of the actions identified through the event were things that had already been identified, and which had been included in a COSLA bid to the European Commission for funding. Unfortunately, COSLA found out in November that bid had been unsuccessful. However, officers are now in discussion with Scottish Government about alternative funding sources to support this important work and the development of the action plans.

### **#ScotWomenStand**

6. COSLA is also supporting The Parliament Project and YCWA Scotland's campaign to support more women to enter politics. Cllr Alison Evison participated in their virtual launch event on twitter on Wednesday 21 November, which was also the 100th anniversary of the passage of the Act of Parliament which allowed women to stand for Parliament. COSLA looks forward to more opportunities to collaborate on this initiative which runs until September 2019.

### **Equally Safe**

7. Equally Safe is Scotland's Strategy for preventing and eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls. The Strategy and its associated Delivery Plan was developed by COSLA and the Scottish Government in association with a wide range of expert partners. COSLA recognises that violence against women and girls damages health and wellbeing, limits freedom and potential, and is a fundamental violation of human rights. COSLA, the Scottish Government and key partners are committed to preventing and eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls, (alternatively know as 'gender based or gendered violence').
8. In September 2018 an Equally Safe Policy Co-ordinator was appointed. In October 2018 the Community Wellbeing Board approved a 12 month Equally Safe Action Plan to take forward action to support Local Government in its delivery of the Implementation Plan at a local level.

### **Next Steps**

9. The next steps for 2019 are:
  - Secure funding to take forward COSLA's actions from the Gender Equality conference and to support other work related to political representation of women.
  - Establish the Special Interest Group on Barriers to Elected Office as a means for elected members to contribute more actively to this agenda on an ongoing basis.
  - Establish a mentoring scheme for potential women councillors and a national cross-party Women's Forum to provide peer support to councillors.
  - Take forward the Equally Safe Action Plan agreed by the Community Wellbeing Board in November 2018.

**December 2018**