



Title of Report:	Women's Sub-Group
Committee Report Submitted To:	Corporate Policy and Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	24th November 2020
For Decision or For Information	For Decision

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Innovation and Transformation
Outcome	
Lead Officer	

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is for Committee to consider the Structure, Membership and Representation on the Women's Sub-Group to enable arrangements to be made for the first meeting. A provisional date of Thursday 7th January 2021 has been booked in the Corporate Calendar.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The following Notice of Motion was agreed by Council at the meeting on 1st September.

'That this Council establishes a stand-alone 'Women's sub-committee' made up of female representatives of this council to discuss and promote women's issues, to build the skills and confidence of female representatives and to promote women getting involved in local politics to aim to achieve proportionality'

- 2.2 An extract from the minutes relating to the Notice of Motion is included in Appendix 1 for ease of reference.

- 2.3 In terms of structure, numbers and representation of the group, an extract from the minutes reads

"..., any sub-committee should be non-restrictive of numbers and encompass all parties and none and be able to engage with particularly but not solely female leadership figures in our own council ranks and beyond. These skills, experiences and policy discussions should be open and welcoming to all..." and

...The vision is that this will be of informal structure and a group comprised of female representatives but also importantly our male allies who should also be encouraged to attend and become champions and allies on women's issues. A group of elected representatives engaging our own organisation, other organisations, seeking training, education, confidence building, networking and expertise and empowering each other both inside this chamber and within the community that we represent"

3.0 Considerations

- 3.1 Council needs to agree on both the structure of the Group and the number/representation on the Group before the first meeting of the Group can be arranged

- 3.1 Structure of the Group ie Sub Committee or Working Group
- 3.2 Method of appointment
- 3.3 Representation on the Group (Members and Officers)

4.0 Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Committee consider the structure, method of appointment and representation on the Women's Group to enable scheduling of the first meeting

Appendix 1

NOTICE OF MOTION PROPOSED BY COUNCILLOR PEACOCK, SECONDED BY COUNCILLOR C MCSHANE

Extract from CPR Minutes 25th August 2020

'That this Council establishes a stand-alone 'Women's sub-committee' made up of female representatives of this council to discuss and promote women's issues, to build the skills and confidence of female representatives and to promote women getting involved in local politics to aim to achieve proportionality'.

Councillor Peacock spoke in support of her Notice of Motion and read from a prepared statement:

"Thank you Chair and thank you for indulging me at the beginning of tonight's meeting.

Only 26% of all councillors in the north are female, this is well below the European average of 33% despite more than half of the population being female. While I am proud that Causeway Coast and Glens Council has the highest % of female elected representatives of all the councils- a lot of work still needs to be done.

More and more frequent reports from around the world indicate that when women step forward to claim their right to participate in politics, they are met by a backlash that encompasses harassment and abuse both online and offline, many local cases have been publicised recently. Such widespread attacks against politically active women are a clear indicator of the negative impact of unequal gender norms on the democratic health of our societies. This is the case not only here, but across the world.

Over the last century, significant progress has been made in women's numerical representation in politics around the world. But all too often, this has not directly translated into greater political influence. Political equality remains a distant goal. Efforts to improve female representation in politics have often focused on quotas and reserved shares. What is really needed is a nuanced approach that tackles the underlying, interconnected barriers that women face in getting nominated for elected office, conducting successful campaigns and becoming effective, respected political representatives. For example in my DEA Ballymoney, I was the only female candidate out of 12 on the ballot paper. I do not accept that this is good enough and we have to ask ourselves why are our women not putting themselves forward and more importantly we have to do something about it.

Some social scientists cite traditional family arrangements that limit women's career choices. Researchers at the Brookings Institution have found what might be called an ambition gap, generally within the population with women underestimating their abilities and chances for

success. It makes them generally less likely than men to even consider seeking public office, or to have political professionals encourage them to run. This needs to change.”

Research has suggested that lack of confidence and self-assurance is a key issue for women in political life or those with an interest in entering political life and this prevents many from entering the male dominated sphere of politics. We must provide a vehicle to change this.

Training and mentoring programmes which focus on helping women attain the knowledge, skills and confidence to stand for election and become effective respected, representatives once elected have been identified as one potential way to break down some of the barriers for political representatives and potential candidates.

There has been evidence from social scientists that in the general population there is a particular crisis for women—a vast confidence gap that separates the sexes. According to research, Compared with men, women don't consider themselves as ready for promotions, they predict they'll do worse on tests, and they generally underestimate their own abilities. This disparity stems from factors ranging from upbringing to biology to social norms bearing in mind that women only garnered the right to vote and stand for election just over 100 years ago, it appears that change in politics, acceptance for women in the arena and confidence has seen slow progress In this time.

A growing body of evidence shows just how devastating this lack of confidence can be. Success in every walk of life, it turns out, correlates just as closely with confidence as it does with competence. No wonder that women, despite all our progress, are still woefully underrepresented at the highest levels.

While we have some of the most confident, politically astute female representatives in this chamber a lack of confidence can impact us all or indeed some more than others on occasion and in particular those outside this chamber who have not, but may have considered, putting themselves forward for political office, as community representatives or other key figures in the wider political and civic landscape. As political representatives, We are supposed to be leaders in our society, role models to young women and yet are not very often afforded adequate training and development which gives thought to differing learning styles and differing approaches identified in research as being important for most women and the different styles and approaches more comfortable for some women. This results in limited opportunities to fulfil our own potential and bring other women with us. We are political representatives. We have a duty to challenge and change the unequal, unspoken and sometimes un noticed gender norms that exist within political life and whether we want to admit it or not exists within this council and every other sphere of political influence here and indeed worldwide.

How many times have we sat in a meeting with an agency or individual to find that the person we are meeting directs their attention to the male in the room despite you being the party, group or individual leading on the issue? This has happened me and no doubt many of my female colleagues many many times. Some of these gender norms are unconscious and entirely unintended, however, we have a duty to identify and challenge these at every opportunity.

I am a young female, relatively new, elected representative of 30 years old and I am determined to make political life and indeed the linked community and civic life more accessible and equitable for fellow women.

I do not accept the unequal gender norms or the lack of confidence that many women within every walk of life including ours suffer or the unequal political influence that exists, according to research, in political life and I will not accept the fact that female representatives are faced with more harassment and abuse than our male counterparts and I am determined to do something about it. I am pleased to bring forward this motion that will bring together our representatives from all parties and none to look specifically at these issues and indeed many others to educate and empower.

A group that may be able to reach out to other organisations, sectors, our young women and girls and those employees of local government. We may be able to harness experience and expertise to share experience, skills and find a way to tackle some of the serious issues impacting women in our society in political life and outside it.

I reiterate, any sub-committee should be non-restrictive of numbers and encompass all parties and none and be able to engage with particularly but not solely female leadership figures in our own council ranks and beyond. These skills, experiences and policy discussions should be open and welcoming to all.

The vision is that this will be of informal structure and a group comprised of female representatives but also importantly our male allies who should also be encouraged to attend and become champions and allies on women's issues. A group of elected representatives engaging our own organisation, other organisations, seeking training, education, confidence building, networking and expertise and empowering each other both inside this chamber and within the community that we represent.

I am passionate about this issue and I call on the support of you all- our male allies included- to bring this about and to help empower our female colleagues setting an example to other organisations and leading the way on this issue.

Thank you all for taking the time to consider this motion, many thanks Mr Chair". The Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor C McShane, she advised this was an opportunity to work together, to recognise and celebrate the achievements of women, personal development and to advocate change.

All Parties stated their respective support for the Notice of Motion.

Councillor Peacock clarified she envisaged an informal structure, welcoming female representatives and male allies, to provide an opportunity to champion women's issues.

The Chair put the Notice of Motion to the Committee to vote. Committee voted unanimously in favour. The Chair declared the Notice of Motion carried.