

Ariane Burgess MSP
Convener, Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee
By email

31st March 2023

Dear Ariane

Thank you for your letter and I welcome the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee's focus on the important issue of diversity and participation in local politics, in particular with the focus on increasing women's participation.

In responding to the points you have raised in your letter, I am pleased that the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party has presented its highest ever number of female candidates at the most recent General, Scottish Parliament and local government elections.

While there is still significant progress to make, I am pleased to note that at the most recent local government elections in May 2022, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party stood both a higher number and proportion of female candidates than at previous elections. As a result, our number of female councillors increased, even while the Party's overall number of councillors fell, and the Party's proportion of female councillors increased from 17% in 2017 to 26% in 2022.

I would also note that at the local government elections in May 2022, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party stood the highest number of both BAME candidates and of candidates with disabilities than at any previous local government elections.

Data gathering and statistics

The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party publishes figures for local government and Scottish parliamentary elections at www.scottishconservatives.com/candidatediversity and UK parliamentary elections are published at www.conservatives.com/parliamentary-diversity-data.

Conservative candidates elected (2022)	
Male	74%
Female	26%
BAME	1%

Conservative candidates selected (2022)	
Male	72%
Female	28%
BAME	4%

Conservative candidates elected (2021)	
Male	74%
Female	26%
BAME	6%

Conservative candidates selected (2021)	
Male	74%
Female	26%
BAME	5%

Quotas

The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party has not adopted quotas for candidate selection. There are no current plans to do so.

I do believe strongly in active recruitment, encouragement and support of women candidates throughout the selection and election process.

Selection process/campaigning

The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party’s selection processes are open and designed to encourage fairness in consideration, as well as applicants from a wide range of backgrounds.

I welcome the effort of organisations to work with parties to improve understanding of selection processes. Our Party proactively recruits female candidates, and selection committees are keen to ensure that candidates are fully representative of Scotland and their communities. To increase the number of female candidates, we must increase the number of women coming forward.

In respect of women councillors’ access to statutory parental leave and caring responsibilities, I note that councillors are not employees of their respective political parties but that parties, and council groups, can provide support. In my experience, the pressures placed on councillors vary significantly between local authorities and are often reflected in the varying support provided by local authorities to their councillors, including in members services and administrative staff support.

In respect of the impact of single transferable vote on multiple candidates of the same party, I do not believe that changes to legislation around elections by single transferable vote would assist with increasing diversity in wards where parties are running more than one candidate. At present, the ordering of candidates by surname allows for potential

disadvantages in ballot ordering to be anticipated before the close of nominations, and therefore compensated at an early stage with parties' vote management. There are a number of examples at the most recent local government elections where we have been able to manage the vote to ensure equitable opportunity for multiple candidates and overcome any imbalance on ballot order. Proposed solutions, such as randomisation, would only be possible at the close of nominations and would therefore be less predictable and limit parties' abilities to reduce inequity of ballot ordering.

Councillor retention/support networks

We have an active and increasing group to support councillors, the Scottish Conservative Councillors Association, which provides ongoing mentoring and support for councillors across Scotland.

In addition, in recent years, the Party has grown activity through our outreach groups – Conservative Women's Organisation – Scotland, Women2Win Scotland, Scottish Conservative Friends of BAME, and the Scottish Conservative Disability Group – to ensure that there are specific forums to engage with and support councillors in underrepresented groups.

The Party's professional staff have also offered and undertaken visits to all council groups across Scotland to ensure that the Party can provide continue to proactively provide a duty of care to councillors.

Culture and toxicity

The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party has a clear Code of Conduct, which regulates behaviour to which all members and elected representatives must adhere. This is available on our website and circulated to members.

The Code of Conduct is under regular review and was most recently updated in October 2022. Any breaches of this Code of Conduct are handled by our Party's Complaints Team and referred to the Party's Management Board for consideration.

The Party has a programme of equality & inclusion training, which is required for all senior Party office bearers, the Party Management Board and Candidates Board; as well as being offered to all elected representatives across the Party.

Equal Representation in Politics Toolkit

While use of the Equal Representation in Politics Toolkit is used by candidates in the Party, its use has not been formally required to date.

Additional comments

More generally, I would note the importance of encouraging candidates of all parties and none to put themselves forward as local government candidates to serve their communities. I

would recognise the increasing pressures on councillors in recent years and note that there are many factors, including remuneration, which span across parties and are outwith our auspices.

I am pleased that more candidates than ever before stood for the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party in May 2022, and that this was the most diverse group of candidates that our Party has ever stood.

I welcome progress on widening participation and the committee's consideration of this important topic, and look forward to the committee's recommendations.

Yours sincerely,



Craig Hoy MSP

Chairman

Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party