



Scottish Green Party
19b Graham Street
Edinburgh
EH6 5QN

ecc@scottishgreens.org.uk

Friday 31st March 2023

Ariane Burgess
Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

By email localgov.committee@parliament.scot

Dear Ariane,

Thank you for your letter dated 2nd March 2023, requesting input to the Local Government, Planning and Housing Committee on the topic “understanding barriers to participation in local politics”. We have discussed this within our Elections and Campaigns Committee, Women’s Network and other representative groups and address the topics raised in the headings below.

Data monitoring

Our candidates for Local Authority elections in 2022 were asked to complete an equality, diversity and inclusion questionnaire. We have information for just under half of our candidates and are keen to publish this information with more robust data, as per our commitment to inclusion Scotland’s “Access to Politics” charter. We will endeavour to collect as much missing data as possible and publish the data with this additional information.

Quotas

Gender balancing rules are included in our candidate selection procedures for all electoral levels, including local authority elections. Despite these efforts, our councillors are not gender balanced and we continue to work on areas where we can improve this.

Selection procedure

Our selection procedure is open to all members to review, and our committees are led by gender-balanced convenors to aim to ensure women are involved in decision making at every

level. We also have a clear party Code of Conduct that applies to all members and aims to ensure a positive environment in our meetings.

We recognise Women 50:50's comments regarding late efforts to seek gender balanced candidate lists and, along with our Women's Network and Party Council, are trying to implement changes that will support women to consider standing earlier. Our Women's Network have also highlighted the need for funded support for women candidates as well as other barriers to women's participation at all levels.

Our Association of Scottish Green Councillors group has established peer and mentor support for councillors. This is based on a traditional buddy system, as well as allowing councillors to seek advice on and share areas of specific expertise where needed.

Regarding candidate listing on ballot papers, unfortunately systemic biases within society mean that names of women and people from ethnic minorities may lead to them receiving less votes. The Scottish Greens support proportional voting systems, and our preference is an open list system, common to many other European countries. However, this is still open to the same systemic biases of any system where candidates are named. We would be open to considering measures to re-order candidates' names on ballot papers, such as having candidates from under-represented groups close to the top of the ballot paper or random listing of candidate names.

Councillors retention / support networks

Our Association of Scottish Green Councillors meets to provide peer and buddy support as described above. Our party also has representative groups where councillors can seek advice from those with lived experience. Councillors also get support from volunteers in their local branches who provide support with their local work, campaigning etc.

We have a duty of care to all our members and are aware of the particular pressure our elected representatives face. We aim to support our councillors through above measures as well as staff support and training.

Unacceptable behavior

The Scottish Greens have a [Code of Conduct](#) intended to enshrine positive behaviour within party relationships, meetings, online discussions etc. This is upheld via our Conduct and Complaints committee.

We have excellent role models in our women elected representatives and have a good history of providing peer and mentor support to candidates and continue to get feedback on the support we provide, with aims to improve this after each election.

Equalities representation toolkit

The above toolkit has been shared with our branches via Scottish Green Party Council, and branch co-convenors and committees are being encouraged to review their procedures and implement changes. To date this is not a requirement but will continue to be reviewed as part of our on-going work.

Additional feedback

Our Women's Network members had some additional feedback regarding barriers to participation in local government politics in particular;

- pay - remuneration for councillors is being reviewed by another committee, but the low level of current pay means women and others are not able to live on a councillors' salary alone. This is a disproportionate barrier to women, who already have caring responsibilities etc and may be unable to take on second jobs.
- Local Council workers - 75% of staff working in local authorities, on average, are women. Related to the above point, women need more than one job to live if they are a councillor but are unable to continue working in their local authority job. This is a disproportionate barrier to women standing to be a councillor.

Thank you for your work on this as a committee and if you would like any further information, please feel free to contact me.

Your sincerely

Carolynn Scrimgeour
Co-Convenor Scottish Green Party Elections and Campaigns Committee