

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

12th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6)

Tuesday 23 November 2021

Understanding barriers to local elected office

Introduction

1. At its meeting on 5 October 2021 the Committee agreed to hold a session on understanding barriers to local elected office.
2. The Improvement Service undertook a survey of current councillors and found that of those who responded—
 - 67% were aged 50 or above;
 - 65.7% were male;
 - 98% were white.
3. The Committee is keen to understand why that is a case. The Committee issued a questionnaire on this issue and partly informed by the responses to that has agreed witnesses to give evidence to the Committee at this meeting.
4. The Committee recognises that this is a very significant issue and one it could not possibly do justice to in one meeting. The Committee expects to come back to this issue next year.

Make-up of the panels

5. The Committee will be hearing from three panels of witnesses—
 - Panel 1
 - Councillor Alison Evison, President, COSLA
 - Alexis Camble, Policy and Participation Officer, Equalities COSLA;
 - Sarah Gadsen, Chief Executive, Improvement Service;
 - Laura Hutchison, Principal, Compliance Team Scotland, Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland
 - Panel 2
 - Jessie Duncan, Development Officer, Engender;
 - Councillor Soryia Siddique, Councillor, Elect Her

- Alys Mumford, Steering Group Member, Women 50:50
- Ethan Young, Civic Participation Manager, Inclusion.
- Councillor Junaid Ashraf, Community Engagement Officer, Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations;

- Panel 3

- James Kelly, General Secretary, Scottish Labour;
- Councillor Louise McAllister, Ellon and District;
- Roslyn MacPherson, former council candidate in the Western Isles;
- Councillor Kelly Parry, Local Government Convener, Scottish National Party;
- Councillor Cameron Rose, Southside/Newington.
- Sheila Ritchie, Convener, Scottish Liberal Democrats

6. The Committee has also received a written submission from the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Chairman Robert C B Forman, available at **Annexe A**.

Clerk to the Committee

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Annexe A

Thank you for the invitation but unfortunately, I am unable to attend the evidence session tomorrow. However, if you would permit me, I would like to set out some of the ways in which the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party is encouraging diversity in our council candidates.

Women2Win Scotland and Scottish Conservative Women work to ensure the Scottish Conservative Party fairly represents women at all levels of politics. Both these organisations work to promote the brightest and best women in the party through candidate training, mentoring, networking and financial support.

We work closely with, and provide support to, our thriving youth wing - represented by Scottish Young Conservatives - to identify and train young talent and provide a pipeline for standing for election at all levels.

Scottish Conservatives Friends of BAME supports and inspires a diverse range of people to engage with the Party and provides a platform to promote ideas for improving diversity and inclusion at every level of elected office, both internally and externally. Through mentoring, awareness and outreach, the Scottish Conservative Friends of BAME is working to support more people from diverse backgrounds into political life at council and parliamentary level.

The Scottish Conservatives have also established a Disability Working Group, which brings together elected representatives from parliament and councils in Scotland and aims to promote the inclusion of disabled people in all levels of Conservative politics. The Party provides personalised assistance and support to candidates, as well as having signed Inclusion Scotland's Access to Politics Charter and worked with Inclusion Scotland in previous local election cycles to ensure there are no barriers facing disabled people.

The Scottish Conservative Party is committed to ensuring greater diversity at all levels. We have worked with a number of external partners for guidance and information regarding our processes, and will continue to look for ways in which we can remove barriers to standing for election.

Kind regards

Robert C B Forman MBE WS
Chairman