

Women's Local Government Society
www.womeninlocalgovernment.org.uk
ESTABLISHED ON A NON-PARTY BASIS

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Improving the proportion of women elected as councillors

Dear Ms Spelman,

I am writing on behalf of the Women's Local Government Society, a cross-party organisation working to achieve better representation of women in local government. The specific questions in this letter are being addressed to all three main political parties, and arise out of discussion at our recent Annual General Meeting. Firstly, I want to acknowledge that achieving equality for women in elected representation in local government is only part of wider goals, and that local government needs to be generally more representative of local communities. We welcome discussion and action that is currently taking place to encourage younger Muslim women to play a role in local community life, for example.

As an organisation we have been following closely the work of the councillors' commission, and we support the objectives of the commissions' findings. We therefore recognise that both central and local government, as well as political parties, have a role to play in achievement equality, and will be addressing some questions to government ministers and the LGA.

Our first questions concern the specific plans for local government reorganisation, now due to go ahead in Bedfordshire and Cheshire as well as various locations announced previously. The moves to unitary councils include a reduction in the numbers of elected councillors in those areas. We are keen to ensure that in implementing the changes the current average representation of women at 29% does not get worse, and preferably is improved on.

Could you please inform us:

- a) What initiatives you are taking at a national, regional and local level to ensure women have better representation on the emerging new authorities?
- b) Have you set any targets for acceptable levels of representation for women, and if so what are they?
- c) Are there any specific resources targeted at improving gender representation on the new councils by your party?

Our second group of questions concern the more general proposals raised by the councillor's commission:

- a) Has your party formally considered the findings of the councillor's commission, and what response will it make to the commission?



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- b) There a number of specific suggestions concerning political organisations in the report. Amongst them is a suggestion that political parties should consider a voluntary agreement to act as if they were bound by the equalities duties on race, gender and disability in respect of selection of local government candidates. Is this a mechanism you are prepared to contemplate?
- c) The commission also make a number of suggestions concerning the contribution councils themselves can make to improving representation. Have you taken any action to share those ideas with your political group leaders at a local level and to recommend them to them?
- d) Research shows that women are particularly under-represented in local government leadership. Are you taking any steps to support women into leadership positions?

I hope you will be able to give these issues a considered response, which we intend to summarise in a newsletter to all our members and place on our web- site.

Yours sincerely



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Chairman Women's Local Government Society

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