



Ariane Burgess  
Convenor,  
Local Government, Housing  
and Planning Committee

Local Government, Housing and  
Planning Committee  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh

24/03/2023

Dear Ariane,

Thank you for your letter. Please see our responses to your questions below.

### **Data gathering and Statistics**

As a party we can confirm that we have signed up to the Inclusion Scotland's access to politics charter and filled out the charter questionnaire. A breakdown of male and female candidates from the Local Government Elections 2022 was published and going forward we are happy to work with Inclusion Scotland on gathering a collection of data on our commitment to the charter.

### **Quota**

We are very proud of the fact that as a party, Scottish Labour has several mechanisms in place to ensure that a gender balance occurs when selection our local government candidates, which in turn hold the party to account for ensure diversity in the candidates.

One of the actions taken in the selection of candidates for the 2022 elections was the codified requirement within our rules stating 50% of new candidates had to be women.

A proactive rule which is part of our selection operating documents states all incumbent councillors have to be put up for reselection, so where historically there have been a gender imbalance, women have the opportunity to go for selection against incumbent male councillors. Additionally, to protect incumbent seats held by women, even although these seats go up for reselection they are done so on AWS (All Woman Shortlist) basis to protect women spaces. Furthermore, in winnable wards for the Scottish Labour Party selections were either ran on a ZIP basis or AWS to allow women to challenge more winnable seats for our party.

Where there are vacant seats local parties and Local Government Committee (the bodies which overlook selections for local government locally) are encourage to approach women in the first instance.

### **Selection Process/Campaigning**

We have taken strides in ensuring that diversity among candidates is not a “scramble for numbers” but instead “a long-term investment in development”. In the first instance our rules state that Local Government Committees is gender balanced.

We agree with the committee that there are many barriers, especially to women candidates and councillors coming forward particularly around statutory parental leave and the disproportional impact of caring responsibilities on women. While targeted policies which will combat these cannot come from us as an opposition party we ensure that we have supporting networks in place for all female candidates and councillors.

The ‘Maria Fyfe Mentoring Scheme’ is one that the Scottish Labour Party has set up in the last few months to support women to come forward in politics by pairing them with women who have been working in the politics and have experience and knowledge of how to overcome and combat the barriers women feel in political life. The aim of the scheme is to empower and support women candidates. We know the barriers of low pay and long working hours are systemic to being in local government and while we take as many steps to encourage a diverse range of candidates coming forward our efforts are often not enough.

Internally however we do as much as we can to promote an environment where diversity in candidates who come forward is encouraged. Training is made readily available to all members of the party, candidates and sitting councillors on a range of things from unconscious bias to how to run an inclusive and accessible campaign.

### **Councillor Retention/Support Networks**

We have several internal party networks and affiliated organisations who provide support networks to underrepresented groups. LGBT+ Labour Scotland launched the

“Rainbow Network” of Scottish Labour elected members, candidates and activists who identify as LGBT+.

We also have funding allocated within our Women’s Committee toward setting up a support network for women within the BAME community with the aim of developing and building an action plan to improve representation of BAME women in Scotland. Specifically looking out-with election periods to enable a more intersectional approach as women of colour often face multiple societal barriers.

Within our regional local party networks have also set up support networks for underrepresented groups which we are planning to expand to more regions.

### **Culture and Toxicity**

As mentioned above the Party has gone to great lengths to encourage a more positive culture in politics centred around respect, understanding and inclusion.

Regarding unacceptable behaviour the party has both a strict code of conduct for candidates and councillors which must be adhered to. Our processes allow for any councillor who has been deemed to have behaved inappropriately under this code of conduct to be denied the usual practice of sitting councillors being automatically shortlisted for selection and called back to the LGC for an interview.

### **Equal Representation in Politics Toolkit**

We have not formally used the toolkit, however many of our rules and processes coincide with the objective of the toolkit and its intention to enable political parties to assess and enhance our practice around accessibility diversity and inclusion.

Yours sincerely,

James Kelly

Scottish General Secretary