

On behalf of the UUP Chief Whip Robbie Butler MLA.

Wednesday 15 September 2021

### **AERC WORK PROGRAMME – Gender and Diversity Imbalances in the Assembly and Executive**

The Ulster Unionist Party is proud to be a party open to all who share our vision of a peaceful and prosperous Northern Ireland secure within the United Kingdom.

We believe that the Ulster Unionist Party should reflect Northern Ireland society and with that in mind, we have been working to increase our membership, political participation and outreach with regard to women and young people specifically.

In particular we are committed to increasing the representation of women in politics in Northern Ireland. Women make up just over 50 per cent of society and voters, and it is obviously in the interests of any organisation to work to create a welcoming environment for women as full and equal members in order to ensure the organisation has access to as wide a talent pool as possible. This is in addition to the moral imperative to reduce the imbalance.

We currently have one female MLA out of an Assembly team of ten. That must be viewed in context of the 2017 Assembly Election when the number of MLAs was reduced from 108 to 90 as each constituency was reduced from six seats to five.

Prior to this Election, a quarter of our MLAs were female (4 out of 16).

In spite of the fact that our vote actually increased by 0.3 per cent, the Ulster Unionist Party lost 6 seats and three of these belonged to female candidates (Lagan Valley, Mid Ulster and Upper Bann). In other words, we lost 75 per cent of our female representatives in the Assembly which was a great disappointment.

We are obviously anxious to address this matter and have been working diligently to ensure that we select as many female candidates as possible in next year's Assembly Election and do all in our power to get as many of them elected as possible.

It should be noted that we have very talented female councillors in our ranks - indeed they are represented in nine of Northern Ireland's eleven council chambers. We are working to ensure that in the near future we have female representatives in every council chamber and in MUCH greater numbers than at present.

The Party also has many female party members and an active Youth wing. We want to recruit even more and we have enjoyed a recent upsurge in members which gives us real hope for the future. The breakdown of that surge in terms of age and sex is encouraging, and we will strive to continue to provide an environment that encourages and supports people who wish to seek public office and place themselves

before the electorate regardless of age or sex.

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ENDS

Stephen Barr  
07855 429980

Ulster Unionist Party Press Office