

CE/MMCA/AERC

7 October 2021

Mr Peter Weir MLA
Chairperson, Assembly and Executive Review Committee
Room 276
Parliament Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast BT4 3XX

Dear Peter

RE: ASSEMBLY AND EXECUTIVE REVIEW COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Congratulations on your appointment as Chair of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. The work of the AERC is critical to the effective functioning of the institutions at Stormont and I look forward to engaging with your work programme in the time ahead.

I welcome the work that the committee has undertaken regarding gender and diversity imbalances in the Assembly and Executive. It is my firm view that the institutions should reflect, as far as possible, the society that they serve. I have outlined the action that has been taken by the SDLP in relation to the committee recommendations in their report on women in politics. I am, of course, conscious that although we have made progress, there is much more work to be done and I remain committed to that piece of work.

Recommendation 1

The SDLP is committed to encouraging more women to get involved in political life and to becoming members of our party. To this end, *SDLP Women* is a group recognised in our party constitution which promotes the work of women in the SDLP, arranges training opportunities and represents the interests of women internally and through external campaigns.

Recommendation 2

Since becoming SDLP Leader I have made a point of recognising the talented women in our Assembly team and promoting them to roles of enhanced responsibility. We are lucky to have Nichola Mallon as our Minister in the Executive, Dolores Kelly as our Chief Whip and member of the Assembly Commission and Sinead McLaughlin as Vice Chair of the Economy Committee.

We will continue to give women the opportunity to take on additional responsibility in our team and set a positive example for others.

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Leader
Colum Eastwood MP

Deputy Leader
Nichola Mallon MLA



Recommendation 3

The SDLP has designed and implemented a mentoring programme for new candidates and their campaign teams at local government, Assembly and Westminster elections. This includes training sessions and pairing individuals with more experienced public representatives. We are committed to supporting those who step forward into political life, helping them find their feet and encouraging them to contribute in any way they can.

Recommendation 4

Candidates in elections are chosen by SDLP members in each constituency. Our selection panels, however, are mindful of the need to provide equality of opportunity to the broadest range of candidates. Our Management Committee has expressed a particular desire to promote gender balanced tickets where possible and to encourage women to run for election.

Recommendation 5

The SDLP is currently reviewing media opportunities and performances. We have arranged tailored media training for elected representatives equip all members with the skills to present in public fora.

Recommendation 6

The SDLP elections committee has taken the recommendation for diversity training and will consider providing specific training to selection panels in advance of interviews and conventions.

Recommendation 7

The SDLP management committee is committed to increasing the number of female candidates running for the party. In the December 2019 election 53% of SDLP candidates were women, building on the party's continuing commitment to ensuring our elected representatives are reflective of our society and party membership.

Recommendation 8

The SDLP election committee will give further consideration to this recommendation, mindful that given the relatively small number of constituencies in Northern Ireland, there may be a risk that even anonymised data will allow individuals to be readily identified.

Recommendation 9

The SDLP has maternity, paternity and shared parental leave policies in place for party staff. The party continues to campaign for local government, the Assembly and Westminster to recognise the need to provide a flexible working environment for parents and to introduce similar policies to those offered to political party staff.

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Recommendation 10

The SDLP has clear internal policies for addressing sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying.

The SDLP accepts, in full, the recommendations made by the committee report and will continue to implement these as soon as possible.

If there is any way I can be helpful, please do not hesitate to contact our Party Headquarters.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colum Eastwood', is positioned above the typed name.

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Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC)

Mr Peter Weir MLA
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Mr Colum Eastwood
Social Democratic and Labour Party
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Issued by email: headquarters@sdlp.ie

6 October 2021

Dear Colum,

ASSEMBLY AND EXECUTIVE REVIEW COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

You may recall that the previous Chairperson of the Committee, Ms Pam Cameron wrote to you on 1 July 2021 to request a progress report in respect of the recommendations on addressing gender imbalance within political parties contained in the 2015 AERC '[Report on Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly](#)'.

This is following AERC's meeting on 29 June 2021, when the Committee agreed to seek a progress report from each of the political parties in the Assembly in respect of the recommendations in that report. The recommendations can be found at **Annex A** for ease of reference.

As a reminder, this is in relation to one of AERC's agreed strategic priorities:

Gender and Diversity Imbalances in the Assembly and the Executive (SECONDARY PRIORITY)

- *Measures to address the under-representation of women and minority groups in the political institutions.*
- *Following on from previous AERC legacy report, review actions and research on introduction of legislation on gender quotas.*

I should be grateful for a response by **noon on 4 November 2021**.

Yours sincerely

Peter Weir MLA

Chairperson, Assembly and Executive Review Committee

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommended that political parties should consider developing targeted membership strategies to encourage more women to get involved and become members of their parties.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recognised that high profile female MLAs can act as positive role models and recommended that political parties should take this into account when making political appointments in the Assembly.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommended that political parties should strive to develop mentoring programmes for aspiring politicians both at local government and within the Assembly (Recommendation 3)

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommended that initiatives designed to increase female candidacies are widely known and extensively promoted within a party, are given strong positive and public support by the party leadership and are communicated to supporters.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommended that political parties review their internal media strategy to ensure greater visibility of female politicians.

Recommendation 6

On the issue of candidate selection, the Committee recommended that if not already provided, political parties should consider the introduction of diversity awareness training, advice and support available to party members involved in the candidate selection process.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommended that political parties may wish to consider the introduction of measures to increase the number of female candidates being put forward for election. However, the Committee recognised that the decision on which, if any, measures to introduce remained a decision for the political parties.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommended that political parties may wish to consider collecting and publishing anonymized diversity data on candidates.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommended that if not already in place, political parties should develop policies relating to maternity and paternity leave for politicians and party staff.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommended that political parties should develop procedures for dealing sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying if these are not already in place.

