



Response to Assembly and Executive Review Committee on update on the work being undertaken by the Northern Ireland Assembly Women's Caucus in relation to addressing gender and diversity imbalances in the Assembly and the Executive

The Northern Ireland Assembly Women's Caucus was established in 2016 following Recommendation 23 of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee 2015 report on *Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly*.

Membership of the Caucus consists of all women MLAs. The Caucus is managed by an all-party Steering Group, consisting of 15 Members and the Clerk to the Assembly, and includes a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson.

In the period between 2016 and 2020, the Women's Caucus engaged in programme work related to gender mainstreaming in law and policy. This included stakeholder engagement with civil society organisations in the NI Women's Sector, facilitating training for women MLAs in 'Effective Leadership' and 'Media Management', and engagement with counterparts in the UK and Republic of Ireland legislatures.

In November 2020, the Women's Caucus agreed a Strategic Framework covering the period November 2020 to February 2022. This framework lays out the vision of the Caucus as 'a Northern Ireland where women are equally represented in politics' and the aim 'to address the under representation of women in politics in Northern Ireland'. The Strategic Framework includes the following objectives:

1. To champion and support the recommendations for action listed in the Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly 2015 report by the Assembly Executive Review Committee, in partnership with the political parties, the Assembly and the Executive;
2. To champion the practical implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in partnership with the All Party Group on UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace and Security;
3. To work in partnership with the Northern Ireland Women's Sector to support individual women wanting to become further involved in politics;

4. To work in partnership with the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly, the Northern Ireland Women's and Education Sectors, and with the media, to promote the idea of gender equality in political representation as essential and achievable with the correct targeted action;
5. To facilitate gender-specific training, coaching and study exchanges for women MLAs in partnership with the Clerking and Member Support Office.

On International Women's Day 2021, the Women's Caucus moved its first motion in plenary, calling on the Assembly to support its action plan, which lays out a road map for how to establish a Gender Sensitive Northern Ireland Assembly. The motion received support from all sides of the House. The Action Plan calls for the establishment of a Gender Sensitive Assembly: one which has processes that facilitate the participation of both women and men; that has actions that promote equality and participation; that has an environment that is accessible to both women and men; and that has gender sensitive political parties and politicians.

The Caucus is currently undertaking work to implement actions contained in the action plan.

This includes work related to:

- Correspondence with all political parties offering support and engagement in working towards gender mainstreaming within the Assembly.
- Encouragement of all women MLAS in participating in the recent development session 'Protecting your Social Media Reputation' which included a section on dealing with harassment and trolls.
- Tabling of a motion dealing with gender budgeting (unfortunately, due to pressure on Plenary time, it is unlikely that this motion will appear on an Order Paper before dissolution).
- Engagement with the Speaker in relation to the guidance '10 Practical Principles for Debate in the Northern Ireland Assembly'.
- Establish an image of women MLAs to be permanently displayed in a prominent position within Parliament Buildings.

- Participation in a platform of engagement which includes members of the US House of Representatives, the Northern Ireland Assembly Women's Caucus and the Irish Women's Parliamentary Caucus.
- Participation in an event to mark International Day of Rural Women.
- Engagement with the Speaker in relation to an event to mark International Women's Day 2022.
- Engagement with the Raise Your Voice Project in relation to sexual harassment and sexual violence in communities in Northern Ireland.
- Correspondence with the British Islands and Mediterranean Region Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Committee to encourage engagement with a reconvened Caucus in the new mandate.