

Women Doing Politics Differently

Development of local or regional caucus for women councillors – identifying interest and examining possible supports.

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NOTICE

of the Council of Local Authority-Elected Members
of Electoral Area

ELECTORAL AREA

COUNTY COUNCIL

For the above ELECTORAL AREA

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN

for the Election of County Council Members for the above

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CONTRIBUTORS

LETTRIM COUNTY COUNCIL

East-Manorhamilton

LIST

COUNCILLORS

FOR THE EAST-MANORHAMILT
ELECTORAL AREA, in the Year 1920.

BY ORDER OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL

A Special Election for the East-Manorhamilton Electoral Area will be held on MONDAY, the 31st day of May, 1920.

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to identify interest in developing local caucus with women councillors. It examined possible supports that could be maximised with local authorities and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG).

This report should be read in conjunction with the NWC-NCCWN publication on [Women Beyond the Dáil: Establishing Local Caucus for Women Councillors](#).

Acknowledgements

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We would like to thank all the women councillors who took the time to participate either in the survey or in focus groups. We are grateful for the feedback and insights we received from stakeholders, in Local Authorities, NCCWN/ Limerick Womens Network, See Her Elected, Association of Irish Local Government and women's networks.

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Recommendations

Actions required For the Department of Housing Planning and Local Government:

- Distribute this report to local authority CEOs and ask them to support women councillors who decide to proceed with either an informal caucus, formal women's committee or regional caucus where appropriate, as far as possible.
- Consider issuing the call for proposals to support women and diversity in Local Government on an annual basis, showcasing and sharing the learning from individual projects and include a specific strand on administrative supports for caucuses that local authorities may apply for.
- Change the regulations on councillor training budgets to include recognised regional caucuses as programmes or bodies that contribute to the training and/or continuous professional development of elected members, including peer-led development.
- Liaise with appropriate bodies including the AILG and LGMA about the establishment of a national women's network.
- Communicate the existence of the national network to management in all local authorities.
- Encourage and support local women councillors to actively participate in the national network.

For local authorities:

- Encourage and support women councillors to establish a caucus that best suits their needs and local/regional context where appropriate.
- Invite an external facilitator to give members a space to collectively brainstorm and agree their goals, objectives and potential projects.
- Pass a motion in the council to formally recognise the caucus. If it is a regional caucus notify other councils in the region of this.

- Make meeting rooms, ICT supports, administration supports and copying facilities available to the caucus if required.
- Support committees to run a hybrid model of physical and virtual meetings.
- Wherever possible, hold in-person meetings in advance of the main council meeting to be more cost-effective and reduce travel time.
- If the caucus has a dedicated email address for external representations, access should be restricted to a selected member of the caucus or independent secretariat.

For a formal women's committee

- Support women councillors in establishing the most effective type of committee under the council's Standing Orders, with an agreed Terms of Reference.
- Provide the committee with a dedicated secretariat and research facility.
- Make training available to the chair and vice-chair of the women's committee required.
- Ask the committee to produce an annual report to the council on its work programme, review of set goals, accomplishments etc.
- Incorporate caucus activities into the local authority's corporate plans and annual budget.
- Seek informal input and representations to the committee from local women's and feminist organisations and groups.
- Consider whether councillors in a neighbouring local authority where women's representation is low could informally participate in the committee.

Context

Women’s representation in local government

Research demonstrates that women face numerous barriers in running and getting elected to local (and national) office in the Republic of Ireland.¹ As a result, women remain under-represented in the ranks of local councillors, as indeed they are in national politics. Women accounted for 21% of councillors elected in the 2014 local elections and this figure increased only marginally to 24% in 2019 (226 women councillors). At least 69 co-options have occurred since the 2019 local elections and women have filled 37 of these vacancies (56%).² These changes have brought the number of women local office-holders up to 241 or 25% of all councillors. This is below the EU average of 32% for women’s representation in local and municipal councils.³ There is also a notable urban-rural divide in the likelihood of women being selected and elected for local office in Ireland, with councils representing urban and suburban communities generally more gender-balanced than predominately rural areas.⁴ As a result, substantial variations exist in the number and proportion of women councillors across the 31 local authorities, from one woman representative on Offaly County Council to Dublin City Council and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council where parity has been almost reached (see Table 1). Gender quota legislation targeting the proportion of female candidates has been in place for Dáil elections since 2012, but government has yet to implement similar quota measures for local elections.

Table 1: Women’s representation in each Local Authority (as of October 31st 2020)⁵

Local Authority	Total	No. of Female Councillors	% Female
Carlow	18	2	11
Cavan	18	6	33
Clare	28	5	18
Cork	55	17	31
Cork City	31	6	19
Donegal	37	4	11
Dublin City	63	29	46
Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown	40	18	45
Fingal	40	14	35
Galway	39	7	18
Galway City	18	5	28
Kerry	33	3	9
Kildare	40	16	40
Kilkenny	24	4	17
Laois	19	5	26
Leitrim	18	3	17
Limerick	40	9	23
Longford	18	2	11
Louth	29	10	34
Mayo	30	3	10
Meath	40	14	35
Monaghan	18	3	17
Offaly	19	1	5
Roscommon	18	3	17
Sligo	18	3	17
South Dublin	40	14	35
Tipperary	40	7	18
Waterford	32	4	13
Westmeath	20	4	20
Wexford	34	6	18
Wicklow	32	14	44
Totals	949	241	25

1 NWCI, 2019

2 Kavanagh, 2020

3 NWCI, 2020

4 NWCI, 2020

5 Data calculated by the author

The marginalisation of women in local politics impacts on representative democracy at all scales. With its proximity to women's lives, local government is uniquely situated to strengthen women's leadership and participation and improve the representation of their interests. Research demonstrates a link between the presence of women office-holders in larger numbers and the gender responsiveness of public policy and decision-making.⁶ Importantly, gender imbalances in local government also have implications for shaping the process for candidate selection for the Dáil. Local government is a key pipeline for national office and is statistically more significant for women aspirants than it is for men.⁷ Despite the presence of legislative quotas, the gender imbalance in Dáil Éireann remained much unchanged following the 2020 general election. Women candidates secured just 23% of seats in 2020 (36) and 22% in 2016 (35). Increasing women's representation in local government is thus essential to the quality of local democracy and a gender equality goal in itself, but may also impact positively on gender representation in national politics.

The 2020 Programme for Government – Our Shared Future highlights the need for greater diversity and gender equality in local government, especially where there are far too few women involved in elected politics. The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) has a responsibility under the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 to work for greater women's representation in local and national politics.

Women's caucuses in politics

When women enter parliaments and local councils, they continue to confront masculinised spaces and encounter rules, norms and practices that contribute to

their marginalisation.⁸ These gendered institutional contexts may limit their ability as individuals to make a positive impact for women constituents, improve working conditions for themselves and their women political colleagues, and encourage other women to run for office. For this reason, women politicians in diverse settings have established cross-party caucuses to facilitate their collaboration as women, which allow for collective action across partisan and ideological lines. The Interparliamentary Union (IPU) defines women's caucuses as "mechanisms that have been created within the parliaments of many countries to strengthen cooperation among women in political life".⁹ "There is no one way to caucus"¹⁰ and the structure and priorities of a caucus are dependent on the specific local and political environment in which it operates and the needs identified by women representatives themselves.¹¹

With regard to formality, the IPU classifies women's caucuses as either formal or informal.¹² Broadly, a formal caucus sits within the official structures of the political assembly and has a clearly defined set of roles, responsibilities and mechanisms for accountability, while an informal caucus is an *ad hoc* group of women politicians, usually has a broader set of aims and may have deeper connections with feminist and women's groups. There is, however, potential for fluidity between these two models of caucus and some women's caucuses occupy a more hybrid space. In formal caucuses, secretariat support is usually provided for by civil servants working in the legislature and the women's voluntary and community sector may undertake this role in an informal or hybrid caucus.

The IPU maintains a database of women's caucuses in national parliaments (there are approximately 86 in existence around the

6 Cullen, 2019

7 Buckley et al, 2015

8 Mitchell Mahoney, 2018

9 IPU, 2013

10 Mitchell Mahoney, 2018

11 NWCI, 2020

12 IPU, 2013

world at present)¹³, however to date there has been no systematic mapping of caucuses established by women office-holders in local or regional governments. In Uganda, a study conducted on five local caucuses found that women's cross-party collaboration in these forums brought numerous benefits to the communities they represent, including the enhancement of education opportunities for girls and boys and giving women a stronger voice in the council chamber.¹⁴ In South Africa, the Local Government Association is promoting the establishment of women's caucuses in each municipal council.¹⁵ The main objective is to bring women office-holders to a level where they would be able to fairly compete with men for high level positions. Women's committees were established within local municipalities in Britain in the 1980s and provided a dedicated space for women to access leadership roles and have their interests represented.¹⁶ However, they were phased out in the 1990s as part of a broader shift to more neoliberal model of local governance and the associated demise of gender equality initiatives across western democracies.

At national level, a Women's Parliamentary Caucus was established by women Oireachtas members in 2017. It is a cross-party forum for Irish women parliamentarians to discuss and campaign on issues predominantly affecting women. The caucus operates according to a constitution.¹⁷ Every current and previous woman member of Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann and the European Parliament is automatically a member of the caucus unless she decides to opt out. In line with other

informal all-party groups in the Oireachtas where administrative support may be provided by a relevant voluntary or interest group, the National Women's Council (NWC) acts as secretariat to the Women's Caucus. During the lifetime of the 32nd Dáil (2016-2020) the caucus moved all-party motions on period poverty in the Dáil and Seanad (2019), pushed successfully for a survey on bullying, harassment and sexual harassment in the parliamentary workplace (2019), celebrated the centenary of (partial) female suffrage in Ireland (2018), and hosted the first International Congress of Parliamentary Women's Caucuses in Dublin Castle (2018).

To date, at least two caucuses have been officially established by women councillors in Ireland: the first in Limerick (2019) and another more recently in Dublin City (2020). The general aims of each caucus broadly align in their pursuit of representing women's interests and perspectives in local decision-making and encouraging more women to run for office, but they operate very different structures. The Limerick Women's Caucus is largely informal (however, it has been recognised by the full council) and the secretariat is currently provided on a voluntary basis by the NCCWN/Limerick Women's Network.¹⁸ By contrast, the Dublin City Council (DCC) Women's Committee was established as a sub-committee of the DCC Protocol Committee. Council staff act as secretariat. The experiences of women councillors in both caucuses, and their recommendations for further supports required for caucus activity, are detailed in this report.

13 <http://w3.ipu.org/>

14 Women's Democracy Network, 2014

15 <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/22420/>

16 Cullen, 2018

17 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/members/womens-caucus/>

18 <https://nccwn.org/project/nccwn-limerick/>

Background to the research

The National Women's Council (NWC) commissioned this research as part of our women in leadership work to deepen our understanding of the barriers faced by women in running and getting elected for office and the development of initiatives and legislation to advance gender equality in politics. In addition to gender quotas, caucuses for women in politics are one mechanism that have been used internationally to strengthen the capacity of women holding elected office and increase the number of women contesting for seats.¹⁹ In 2019, with support from the DHPLG, NWC and the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWN) published a guide for women local office-holders interested in establishing a local caucus.²⁰ However, a number of challenges exist for women councillors seeking to work collaboratively through a caucus structure. Issues arise where no funded independent organisations or groups exist in the local area to provide the independent secretariat role. Resources do not currently exist to support the secretariat role where independent groups and organisations that could take on the function are active. There are practical questions about how caucuses can be formed in cases where the number of women on a local council is very low and whether women can come together across different councils to establish a regional network. On a related point, clarity is required around expenses for women councillors who may be interested in participating in a regional caucus.

Aims of the research

This research establishes the levels of interest among women councillors in developing a local or regional caucus structure. It also examines possible supports that could be maximised with local authorities and the DHPLG. Crucially, the

Covid-19 pandemic has given rise to new opportunities to facilitate local or regional caucuses to develop and meet online. Virtual meetings can reduce travel and time burdens and costs that could potentially have been identified by women councillors and local authorities as barriers to a caucus.

This research has a number of aims:

- To document the experience so far of the first women's caucus in Limerick and other developments in Dublin City, the North-West and Midlands region, and at a national scale.
- To survey women councillors about their interest in participating in a local or regional caucus and how it would work including membership and structure.
- To gain a better understanding of the financial, logistical and human supports required to support the development of local or regional caucuses.
- To assess the role that local authorities can play in supporting a caucus for women councillors, including provision of the secretariat role, making meeting rooms available etc.
- To examine the best cost and time efficient way of organising caucus meetings.
- To explore other models of women's networks in the professions, enterprise and civic society in terms of structure and approach.
- To make recommendations to develop a structured plan to support the roll out of caucuses at a local or regional level.

The research methodology adopted a gender sensitive approach and feminist research practice that combined desk research and analysis of original quantitative and qualitative data with women councillors,

¹⁹ IPU, 2013

²⁰ https://www.nwci.ie/learn/publication/women_beyond_the_dail_a_guide_to_establishing_local_caucus_with_women_councilors
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key stakeholders in the local government area, and representatives from women's networks in a variety of sectors (all networks are member organisations of NWC). Table 2 details the methods employed. Every step of the research process was conducted to

the highest ethical standards. It was ensured that all participants received information regarding the aims and objectives of the project, confidentiality, the methodological process, and how the data would be used.

Table 2: Data collation methods employed

Method	Timeline	Further information
Online survey of all women councillors	July-August 2020	An online survey was distributed via email to all women councillors in Ireland to identify their interest in participating in a local or regional caucus and how it would work including membership, structure, required supports and priority areas. The survey included open text boxes to allow respondents to elaborate on their answers, if they wished. The survey received a response rate of 33%.
Focus group with the Limerick Women's Caucus	July 2020	A virtual focus group was conducted with six of the nine members of the Limerick Women's Caucus.
Participant observation with the DCC Women's Committee	June-July 2020	Along with NWC, the researcher observed (and presented at) two exploratory meetings organised by DCC women councillors interested in establishing a caucus. After the councillors agreed to proceed with a caucus, the researcher also observed a facilitated session of the DCC Women's Committee where members brainstormed their goals, objectives and potential projects.
Interviews with key stakeholders/individuals	July-September 2020	Interviews were conducted with the following stakeholders/individuals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – NCCWN/Limerick Womens Network – DCC Women's Committee – Longford Women's Link/See Her Elected (SHE) – A councillor in Wicklow County Council interested in establishing a caucus – DHPLG - Local Government, Governance and Elected Members – Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) – Council Meetings – Meeting Administrators Group
Interviews with representatives from women's networks	July-September 2020	Interviews were conducted with representatives from the following women's networks/member organisations of NWC. Nine were invited via email to participate in the research and five agreed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Women in Film and Television – National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF) – Women in Medicine in Ireland Network (WIMIN) – Network Ireland – Women in Technology and Science (WITS)

Survey of women councillors

Who was surveyed and who responded?

Working from international research on the factors shaping the establishment and goals of caucuses for women in politics²¹, a survey was constructed aimed at identifying the level of interest among women councillors in caucus and how it would work including membership, structure and required supports. Respondents were also asked about their priority areas for a caucus to focus on. The survey included open text boxes to allow respondents to elaborate on their answers if they wished and many chose to do so, eliciting rich qualitative data in addition to the quantitative answers. The survey was distributed virtually by NWC to all women holding council seats in early July and kept open for a month, with a reminder email sent in-between. With 80 responses (of 235 women councillors), the survey achieved a response rate of 33%.²²

Levels of interest in a local or regional caucus

Respondents expressed very high levels of interest in collaborating across parties with other women councillors in a caucus.

49% were very interested and 42% somewhat interested, with a combined interest level of 90%. There were high interest levels across all political parties and affiliations, including 90% of independents.

Priorities for a local or regional caucus

As discussed, there are many different forms of caucus for women politicians. An analysis

of women's caucuses in state legislatures in the US concludes that women tailor their organisations to meet their specific local needs and in response to the gender and partisan norms of their political and institutional environments.²³ The study differentiates between 'policy' and 'social' caucuses: the former aims to progress policy goals for women's equality while the latter works to facilitate cross-party friendships, supports and information-sharing. Of course, caucuses can do both social and policy work if time and resources allow. Caucuses of all hues often prioritise their role in inspiring other women to run for office, including mentoring and outreach schemes, making women representatives more visible to the public and media, and lobbying for supports for women in politics.²⁴ Importantly, the numerical representation of women office-holders in a particular assembly will usually influence the aims of a caucus. Assemblies with a moderate to high number of women office-holders can organise around public policy goals, but areas with low numbers of elected women may focus on connecting women in the community with the local political system and giving them the confidence to run in future.²⁵

Survey respondents were given a pre-defined list of priorities for a caucus and asked to rate the importance of each. Among this sample of councillors, **role model effects and the recruitment and retention of women in public life were ranked as the most important areas for caucuses to work on.** This reflects the low proportion of women councillors across the country, particularly in rural areas (Table 1). Unsurprisingly then,

21 IPU, 2013

22 Women representing the Green Party and the Social Democrats are over-sampled among respondents relative to their distribution in the population. Green Party councillors account for 16% of survey respondents and 9% of the female councillor population and the respective figures for the Social Democrats are 10% and 4%. Women in Fine Gael are under-sampled, comprising of 16% of survey respondents and 27% of all female councillors. Other party differences are marginal and not statistically significant.

23 Mitchell Mahoney, 2018

24 IPU 2013

25 NWCI, 2020

advocating for the introduction of measures to enhance women's representation in local politics and working with women representatives at national level to further progress gender equality were identified as the next more important areas of priority. This was followed broadly by policy-related work at local level including increasing the influence and capacity of women councillors, promoting women's perspectives and issues and gender mainstreaming in decision-making, and working with the civic and voluntary sector.

Responses were asked if there are other areas that a women's caucus could prioritise. The issues raised included childcare supports for councillors, training, personal development and leadership opportunities for women councillors, encouraging all parties to support women candidates, and working to improve how councils operate and deliberate. On the latter point, one respondent stated a caucus should aim for "more feminist and less hierarchical structures with more collaboration".

Importantly, respondents argued that caucuses take an intersectional approach to women's representation and consider the full diversity of women in their activities.

"Working to support women with disabilities, autistic women and Traveller women to take leadership roles".

"I think that crucially it's important to push forward issues that represent barriers for working class women and women from marginalised backgrounds".

"[Support] women with disabilities in politics".

Practical supports for a caucus

Meeting locations to maximise participation

Respondents listed practical supports required for a caucus to run effectively. In relation to the location of caucus meetings, numerous councillors stated that meetings should be held virtually at mutually agreed times. They noted that the pandemic has moved a lot of their council work online and this has minimised travel time. For example: "With Covid-19 in our midst, a lot of meetings are taking place via Zoom which eliminates travel and time wasting". A second councillor shared that:

"Virtual meetings being normalised has been very helpful in including women".

Another suggested that online meetings would maximise participation in a caucus, and they may be particularly beneficial for councillors with childcare, work and/or study responsibilities. Online platforms for meetings would also reduce the costs required for local authorities to support a caucus. However, it was highlighted that virtual meetings "need to be well-chaired and managed".

By contrast, a small number of respondents argued that caucus meetings would need to be conducted face-to-face, ideally in advance of the main council meeting as they will be travelling to the council offices that day anyway. For example: "Webinars do not work. Face-to-face contact is what is required. There are not that many women councillors in the regions that a couple of well-run conferences can't be arranged. Face to face interaction is the best way to communicate". 11 councillors preferred a blended model of virtual and physical meetings, either changing it for every few times or hosting hybrid meetings to give members a choice on whether to participate online or physically. A sample of these responses are given below.

"Online discussion with physical meetings less regularly to allow for other commitments".

"Well I think we have all become adept at using IT for meetings now so a blended model of physical and IT might be good".

Administrative supports

Given their busy schedules, councillors stressed the need for administrative and research supports for a women's caucus. To quote one survey: "Administrative support for councillors is nil". A dedicated secretariat was considered key to getting councillors on-board and having someone to pre-circulate the agenda and write up minutes of meetings.



Additional comments

A number of other important themes arose in the qualitative sections of the survey and these were coded for analysis.

Regional caucuses

Three respondents raised the problem of trying to establish a local caucus in councils where women's representation levels are low. They suggested that a regional structure encompassing a number of councils would be more appropriate. Related to this, another councillor stated that she was willing to work with anyone to advance gender representation but that the small number of women on the council struggle to maintain collegiately because of deep ideological differences.

National caucus

Others put forward the idea of establishing a national caucus to allow all women councillors to work collectively on common goals. For instance:

"I believe there needs to be a focus on a national caucus bringing together women across the country to lobby for national changes in dealing with remote voting, claiming childcare as an expense etc. While regionally based caucuses may be valuable, in many areas there won't be enough women to participate and our collective bargaining will be diluted".

Regional and national caucus structures are examined in more detail in the next chapter of this report.

Workloads and making the caucus efficient

Numerous respondents discussed the heavy workloads of local councillors in Ireland. The demands on their time were seen to have increased even further in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Previous research by NWC shows the gendered nature of council workloads as women office-holders often work a 'triple shift' combining paid work, unpaid care work and their council duties.²⁶ While councillors were largely receptive to the idea of a caucus, a number argued that it would need to be well-structured, goal-orientated and time-bound in order for women to invest their time in it. To quote one respondent: "It cannot be just a talking shop". Others made a similar point, as this example illustrates:

"I am just concerned about the workload already for women and adding another committee/mentoring will just increase our commitments. There needs to be evidence to back up the benefits from establishing a local women's caucus".

Caucuses or networks already established – learnings so far

Respondents with caucuses or networks already established for women councillors were asked what they have learned so far about the process and if they had any advice for women in other councils interested in setting up a caucus. Some respondents emphasised the importance of accessing institutional knowledge and consulting with long-established women councillors about any historical cross-party gender initiatives.

"We are still in the process of getting started but I'd recommend talking to the more experienced councillors or retired councillors about it before, it can lead to handy short cuts".

Two respondents stated the positive benefits of establishing a caucus and creating a support network for women councillors.

"I am a new councillor and have just had my second meeting with a newly formed caucus for women in my area. It's too early to say but so far I am happy to see how all the women from cross parties have come together to raise each other up. Women can often be the worst at tearing other women down, so I find this forum quite refreshing."

"It is a relatively new process and we are still learning, but I would encourage women councillors in other local authorities to set up a caucus if they can."

However, other respondents advised that women councillors are not a homogenous group. There are challenges and opportunities in bringing them together.

"Important that we value all equally and facilitate women councillors of all ages, respecting diversity and that the experience is empowering for all that participate."

"There are obvious differences and difficulties in bringing together people with very different approaches to politics."

Another survey respondent gave a practical suggestion for other women councillors.

"Set the caucus up with only the women councillors and keep the secretariat within the caucus. Seek advice from [NWC] on all guidelines, constitutions etc. Time to meet can be difficult."

Experiences of local government

The questionnaire also asked councillors a series of questions about their lived experiences of local government. The data suggests areas where caucuses may be able to push locally for change. In relation to the capacity to make a difference, 95% of respondents agreed that they can make a difference for individual constituents and their local community. Three-quarters asserted that they have the capacity to influence the formation and development of local policies and plans. Having more women in local office is suggested to raise the profile of gender equality as a policy issue and research undertaken by NWC in 2019 found high levels of feminist consciousness among women councillors in Ireland.²⁷ 63% of respondents to this survey believe that they can progress women's policy issues in their role as councillor and this bodes well for caucuses in future. However, only 36% agree that local authority officials have a good understanding of gender equality issues (though 38% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement). Two-thirds of respondents have not received adequate training and induction to support their work as a local representative.

Worryingly, 28 respondents (35%) had experienced sexual harassment and/or sexual misconduct in their role as a councillor. This statistic aligns with the experiences of women TDs.²⁸ One response argued for the development of a Dignity and Respect Policy in each municipal district and overall council which councillors and council officials must sign.

Qualitative responses also give examples of the subtler forms of sexism and misogyny experienced by some female councillors. For example:

"Language used by male councillors is unintentionally misogynistic and outdated. There is an overriding feeling of female councillors being tolerated rather than treated equally. My experience is such unfortunately".

"I have experienced sneering and being ignored when trying to interject. This has mainly been experienced from older male councillors (some not all) but let happen unchecked by others".



²⁷ NWC, 2019

²⁸ <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-40048271.html>

Different models of caucus

Drawing on the survey and in-depth qualitative research with caucuses and networks already established for women councillors and key stakeholders in local government, this chapter details four different models of caucus and makes practical recommendations to support the roll out of each of these. As discussed, for caucuses to be effective they should be tailored and flexible to the contexts in which they operate and the specific local needs of women.²⁹ A stakeholder argued that “there is no real precedent for a women’s caucus [at local level]”. This is illustrated by the complexity of issues such as the caucus’ formal relationship to the local authority, the role of the secretariat and who they should be, and expenses for women participating in a caucus.

Informal caucus – Limerick Women’s Caucus

Based on the Oireachtas Women’s Parliamentary Caucus, the Limerick Women’s Caucus was established in September 2019.³⁰ Limerick City and County Council is 23% women. The nine women councillors are all members of the caucus (all bar two were newly elected in 2019) and the NCCWN/Limerick Women’s Network provides the secretariat on a voluntary basis. The councillors were approached by the NCCWN/Limerick Women’s Network about setting up the group soon after the election. It was officially recognised in a motion put to the whole council in early 2020, but it is not a council committee. Their monthly meetings are held on the same day as the main council meeting and listed on the calendar on the council website, because they felt it was important to “build a brand”. The council provides space for meetings, but these have been happening online since the outbreak of the pandemic. A sub-group sets the agenda and decides on press releases.

The caucus is a supportive space for women councillors and aims for work cross-party on issues of gender equality and policy development. In a focus group, members of the caucus outlined the hugely positive benefits of the group. For example:

“We have made really good connections with each other... The first day was like a big counselling session to be honest. I think there was more crying done there than you’d see at a funeral... We were all exhausted from the election campaign. We were delighted to be given the privilege of being councillors and it was lovely to be in a room with like-minded people, even though we’re from different parties. We basically sat in a room with a cup of tea, with [two representatives from the Limerick Women’s Network], and we just got to know each other. We went around the room, said where we were from, what our family situation was. I think that was very valuable because I know I can pick up the phone to people here and say listen, I am talking to you as [her name], not a councillor. And I think that’s a very valuable thing to have... Men have that connection anyway because they’re in sport or they’re in politics or they’re in a job”.

“I think there is a huge value in the nine female councillors being together and working together on issues that are apolitical or

29 NWCI, 2020

30 See also NWCI, 2019

non-political or pan-political, whatever way you want to describe it. I do think that it's very important because it's sending out a message about female politics and about the ability to work together and as combined group that we would have the synergies to effect on some of the projects and stuff that we will take on board".

In relation to activities, the caucus is still very much finding its feet and they are currently in the process of trying to develop a constitution and a direction that they can all agree with. In addition to providing each other with supports and building relationships, the caucus has worked to raise local awareness of gender equality issues including the impacts of Covid-19 of women in the workplace and working to end violence against women.

There are challenges for a women's caucus that sits outside of the formal council structure. As a number of stakeholders argued, there is nothing to stop any group of councillors from setting up an ad hoc forum. However, local authorities are unlikely to be a position to offer supports apart from recognising the caucus, making meeting facilities available and giving the group visibility on the website. One interviewee representing a sectoral organisation accurately described it as a "muddy area". The role of the independent secretariat puts a spotlight on some of these difficulties, for example the potential data protection issues of an independent organisation having access to a caucus email. There are also some concerns among councillors in the Limerick Women's Caucus about being associated with a feminist group.

Nonetheless, if some of these challenges can be overcome (see recommendations), they are significant advantages to women councillors caucusing informally with the support of an outside women's group. It is

a highly innovative model of supporting women in politics and, significantly, follows the approach of the national caucus which has a secretariat from civil society opposed to being a committee of the Oireachtas. On a practical level, the secretariat provides administrative supports to councillors that already have heavy workloads and allows them to participate in the caucus without having to do all of the heavy lifting. Most importantly, the women's community sector has an awareness and expertise of the issues on the ground for local women, including vulnerable and marginalised groups of women.

Informal caucus – Regional caucus in the North West and Midlands

In cases where local authorities have very low numbers of women holding seats (see **Table 1**), it may be necessary to merge councils together on a neighbouring/regional basis to develop a caucus. This would be particularly beneficial for women in rural areas. By its very nature a regional caucus would be informal in scope, but it could and should be officially recognised by individual councils. For a regional women's caucus to maximise participation, members would have to be able to expense travel costs for in-person meetings (see recommendation for DHPLG) with more regular meetings conducted online. An independent organisation or group would also need to be resourced to provide administrative support to the caucus.

The See Her Elected (SHE) project aims to empower women in the rural constituencies of the North West and Midlands to engage in electoral politics and is funded by the DHPLG.³¹ Among its many activities, SHE has brought women councillors from Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon and Longford together to discuss the potential establishment of a five-council caucus. They invited representatives from the Limerick Women's Caucus to speak about their experiences. The group decided to

31 SHE is a collaboration between the Women's Manifesto Project (a Longford Women's Link

programme) and 50:50 North West, organisations with strong links at grassroots level.

focus their energies initially on informal networking to establish relationships and trust with each other. There are 15 women councillors across the five councils and 13 are actively involved with SHE. They have not yet agreed to officially establish a caucus and a stakeholder from SHE advised that they would need to agree on their goals and remit before doing so. However, the organisation is willing to support this on a medium- to long-term basis and act as secretariat if required. SHE has the advantage of being “non-biased, objective and non-partisan”, though in a similar vein to the Limerick experience there are concerns among some councillors about using the “feminist” label in rural politics.

Formal caucus – Dublin City Council Women’s Committee

During this research, numerous stakeholders advised that authorities are able to provide more practical supports to caucuses that establish as formal council committees rather than informally. All councils have Standing Orders which outline the process for setting up new committees. For example, most Standing Orders allow the council to establish a ‘special committee’ for a specific purpose which normally does not exceed one year or such period as the council may determine. This is a potential option for a women’s committee if the council agrees to extend its tenure until the next local election. Another method is to establish as a sub-committee of council committee, say the Protocol Committee if there is one. Working through a Strategic Policy Committee was also raised in a stakeholder interview, however membership of these includes elected members and sectoral interests and thus the model would be quite different to a caucus solely for women politicians. Council staff should work with women councillors to agree the most effective type of committee to progress the caucus’ goals.

The Dublin City Council (DCC) Women’s Committee was established as a sub-committee of the DCC Protocol

Committee in June 2020.³² 90% of women representatives and every party is represented on the Women’s Committee. It has a chair (Councillor Darcy Lonergan, Green Party) and council staff act as secretariat and provide administrative support. Women account for 46% of members of DCC (see **Table 1**).

Councillor Lonergan first initiated discussions about a caucus with her colleagues in early summer 2020. The group had a number of online explanatory meetings where they identified broad priority areas for the caucus and they developed these into clear action items at a meeting with an external facilitator (funded by the DCC). Recognising their heavy workloads, the members agreed that the committee’s activities should be “structured and focused on practical stuff” and within the functional remit of the council. They also felt that they have an important lobbying and advocacy role to play on gender equality issues.

The main aim of the DCC Women’s Committee is to strengthen women’s cross-party co-operation, thereby maximising their overall impact on policies and decision-making. A project which may not have been achievable for one councillor can be progressed through the combined effort and support of multiple woman councillors.

The committee has three key areas of focus:

- Economic (more benefits for carers and better maternity leave);
- Safety (making Dublin a safer city, in terms of urban planning, transport, domestic violence);
- Council work (information exchange, sharing area motions, collective motions).

While a formal caucus can extract more resources from the council than an informal one, there are still some issues to consider. For one, the supply and availability of administrative support provided to councillors is not consistent throughout the country.³³ An interviewee expressed

32 <https://councilmeetings.dublincity.ie/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=288&MIId=4026&Ver=4>

33 Moorhead, 2020

her apprehensions about trying to set up a women's committee if the council does not have adequate resources to lead it. A second concern relates to the fact that, unlike the Limerick Women's Caucus, access by organisations and groups representing women would be more restricted in a formal caucus. However, for councils where no funded independent organisations or groups exist in the local area to provide the secretariat role and where enough women hold seats, establishing a caucus as a council committee is a good option.

Establishing a national network?

Similar to the aims of a regional caucus, a number of research participants advocated for a national network to bring women councillors together. This would be particularly advantageous for councils with very low numbers of women holding seats (see Table 1). There are a number of benefits to a national structure in conjunction with local or regional caucuses. Firstly, it would allow women councillors to network with each other across different councils and political affiliations (which may also benefit councillors planning to run for election to the Dáil or Seanad in future). Secondly, it would enable established local or regional caucuses to disseminate best practices and learn from each other (for example, motions put to the council). Thirdly, it would act as a powerful lobby group on behalf of all women politicians. Finally, one interviewee

advised that a national network would give "more gravitas" to women facing resistance in trying to push for changes in their own councils and result in less duplication of work.

Some work has already progressed in this area. As part of the AILG Annual Conference held in March 2020 in Longford, the AILG hosted an inaugural Women's Local Government Network meeting. The purpose of this session was to help and give guidance on the establishment of women's caucuses or networks at local authority level in order to enable women to strengthen their impact and bring about gender equality.³⁴ Representatives from the NWC, Longford Women's Link/SHE and the Limerick Women's Caucus addressed the delegates.

Interviewees from the AILG advised that the meeting was largely informal, intended to start debate and "came from the ground up". The organisation plans to raise the network at their next AGM for further discussion and development. The AILG highlighted that any such initiative would "wear the AILG hat" and all activities would aim to assist councillors in fulfilling their role as elected members. A significant advantage of hosting annual meetings of women councillors and training opportunities through the AILG is that councillors have allowances for expenses for attendance at the AILG Annual Conference and specific training events provided by the organisation.³⁵



Picture courtesy of AILG

³⁴ <https://lgiu.org/ailg-conference-2020-solving-global-challenges-through-local-leadership/>

³⁵ Councillors also have allowances for expenses for attendance annual seminars and conferences of Local Authority Members Association (LAMA). Normally, 2 are arranged per annum, and attendance will be limited to 2 events per annum organised by LAMA. https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/lg_01-2018_appendix_i_expenses_and_allowances_for_elected_members.pdf

Exploring other models of women's networks

As part of this study, representatives from other models of women's networks in Ireland were interviewed about their structure and approach including the opportunities and challenges presented by Covid-19. These included networks representing women in professions, enterprise and civic society and all are member organisations of NWC (Table 2). While we worked to incorporate a diverse range of organisations seeking to progress women's leadership and success, we acknowledge that our sample was limited by time constraints and does not include organisations representing other women including migrant women and disabled women.

The aims of women's networks in the professions, enterprise and civic society differ in many ways from those in politics and membership is less restricted, but local government caucuses can learn from their experiences and best practices. Research literature shows the benefits of having women's networks in traditionally male-dominated occupational sites.³⁶ The main motives for establishing networks for women are to provide support and to circumvent women's exclusion from 'old boy networks.' Benefits include increased self-confidence, the provision of mentoring and learning opportunities, and growth of social contacts. However, these networks are not a panacea for women's advancement and are most effective when they challenge structural inequalities in the sector or organisation and also when women participate in mainstream networks in parallel with these.³⁷

The following analysis outlines the main aims and activities of the five women's networks examined for this research.

Women in Film and Television (WTF)

Women in Film and Television Ireland is a branch of Women in Film and Television International. The Irish branch is a voluntary body run by film and TV professionals of international standing. WTF has a constitution and committee members represent various divisions of the Irish audio-visual sector. Membership is open to individuals and corporate members, with an annual membership fee, and you must be a professional working in film, television or creative media in Ireland to join. Men can become members of WTF and they have "very strong male allies".

The WTF representative interviewed for this research stated that the group has three broad aims. First, they lobby and call the industry and funders to account on gender equality. Second, they seek to raise the visibility of women in the sector and make their work known. Third, there is a communications strand where they aim to raise public awareness of the main issues and roadblocks for women in film and television. An important strand of their work is organising events and some of these are very large in scope, for example short film showcases and hosting high profile speakers. With Covid-19, WTF has had to move their events online.

National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF)

Founded in 1988, the National Traveller Women's Forum is an alliance of Traveller women and Traveller organisations from throughout Ireland. As a feminist organisation, the forum aims to work collectively to challenge the racism and sexism experienced by Traveller women

36 Pini et al, 2004

37 Ehrich, 1994

and promote Traveller women's rights to self-determination and the attainment of human rights and equality. A representative interviewed asserted the need to assess the marginalisation of Traveller women through the lens of intersectional discrimination and gendered racism. The NTWF is overseen by a voluntary board of management and the organisation has employees.

Individuals may also engage with the NTWF. For example, they run programmes on domestic violence and supported Traveller women during the Covid-19 lockdown. The organisation works to ensure the voices of Traveller women are heard and that they are "empowered to an extreme level". They also do political work to encourage Traveller women to run for election and increase their impact in local decision-making.³⁸ Having to move activities online because of Covid-19 poses particular challenges for the NTWF given the higher levels of digital exclusion faced by the Traveller community relative to the wider population.

Women in Medicine in Ireland Network (WIMIN)

The Women in Medicine in Ireland Network is an organisation that promotes, supports and encourages women doctors and medical students from all specialities and grades in Ireland. It is still "a very young and immature organisation" and was founded in 2017 by Dr Sarah Fitzgibbon who is a Cork-based GP. WIMIN was inspired by the Medical Women's Federation of the UK and it started on social media where Dr Fitzgibbon recruited approximately 100 members initially. WIMIN has paid membership dues and membership is not open to men. The group does not have a committee structure at present.

When asked about the aims of WIMIN, a representative stated that its main focus is to give networking opportunities to members and "create collegiately" among women doctors and medical students in Ireland. The organisation also aims to support women doctors to "find their voice" and take

on leadership roles. In terms of activities, WIMIN has a WhatsApp group with 20-30 participants and it started a pilot mentoring programme in January 2020 with ten pairs set up. They write a weekly tribute to different women doctors to acknowledge their contribution to medicine in Ireland and distribute a newsletter every six weeks. One of the main focuses on WIMIN is their annual conference which was hugely successful in 2018 and 2019. The 2020 conference was postponed until 2021.

Network Ireland

Established in 1983, Network Ireland is a voluntary organisation that supports the professional and personal development of women. Membership is diverse and open to women entrepreneurs, SME owners, professionals and leaders in indigenous and multinational organisations to non-profits, charities, arts and the public sector. It has approximately 1,200 members, with 15 branches across Ireland. Each branch is a part of the wider organisation. The National Executive, which includes branch presidents/vice-presidents and other executive committee roles, normally meets four times per year and has been meeting more than that virtually since the outbreak of Covid-19. A lot of what they do is "in consultation with branch members as representatives of their individual branches".

Through the branch network they organise in excess of 200 events annually. The style of the local branch may vary slightly depending on who the president is at any given time, for instance a business-owner might be more business-focused. Branches organise one-to-one mentoring sessions which "engages the expertise of our members for the development of other members". They also organise training in areas such as tax, finance and marketing and general motivation and wellbeing sessions.

Women in Technology and Science Ireland (WITS)

Women in Technology and Science Ireland (WITS) was founded 30 years ago to support women studying and working in STEM fields in Ireland. It has three visions: Advocating, Acting and Connecting. WITS is a voluntary organisation and is operated in accordance with the association's rules. An executive is elected each year at the AGM and they are tasked with running the organisation on a day-to-day basis. Members are a "broad constituency" and include STEM students to retirees, all areas of STEM, and those working in the public and private spheres. There is a membership fee for individuals and corporate organisations, but full-time students can join for free. Men can become members of WITS.

Events are a key aspect of WITS' work and they are tailored to the needs of different members. Covid-19 has allowed more members living in remote areas to dial into their events. A representative was asked about the value of WITS. First, she stated that it helps members "to break out of the bubble" and meet women working in other fields of STEM. Second, the organisation acts to educate STEM organisations and the wider public about gender inequality issues in STEM, which the interviewee described as "the battles not yet won". Third, WITS informally plays a role in career progression for members. For example, it lists job vacancies in their monthly newsletter and recently ran an event to advise women on how to successfully negotiate their salary.

What other learnings can caucuses take from women's networks?

A number of general themes arose in the interviews that may aid women councillors in their initial discussions about the structure and approach of the caucus and advancing change in local areas.

Impact of Covid-19

All interviewees discussed the challenges and opportunities presented by the pandemic. Since March 2020, most meetings and events have been conducted online or rescheduled to 2021. Virtual meetings were seen as being more accessible to members living in remote areas and/or with caring responsibilities, but they pose challenges for those without access to high-speed internet or suitable devices. Some interviewees also made the point that while virtual meetings have allowed their operations to continue in challenging times, they should not be a permanent fixture in the future because they lose the valuable networking aspects of in-person events. Looking ahead, a hybrid model of physical and virtual meetings and events should be considered.

Finding common ground among members

Women are not a homogenous group. To prevent gridlock, successful women's networks and caucuses aim to find common ground on the issues and strategies that they can advance.³⁹ Interviewees were asked how they achieve consensus among their members. All recognised the reality that women (like men) in diversity organisations will not agree with each other all of the time. However, they emphasised the importance of honest deliberation and discussion and respecting the viewpoints of each member in making decisions. An example of this is whether or not a women's network is explicitly described as 'feminist'. One interviewee discussed how some members on their board felt more comfortable being called "pro-woman as opposed to feminist", in part because they feared that feminism would put off potential funders. In addition, two interviewees mentioned the contested nature of debates within their network about the 'Repeal the 8th' referendum in 2018 and if the group should take a public stance. Strong and dominant voices should not drown out discussion.

39 IPU, 2013

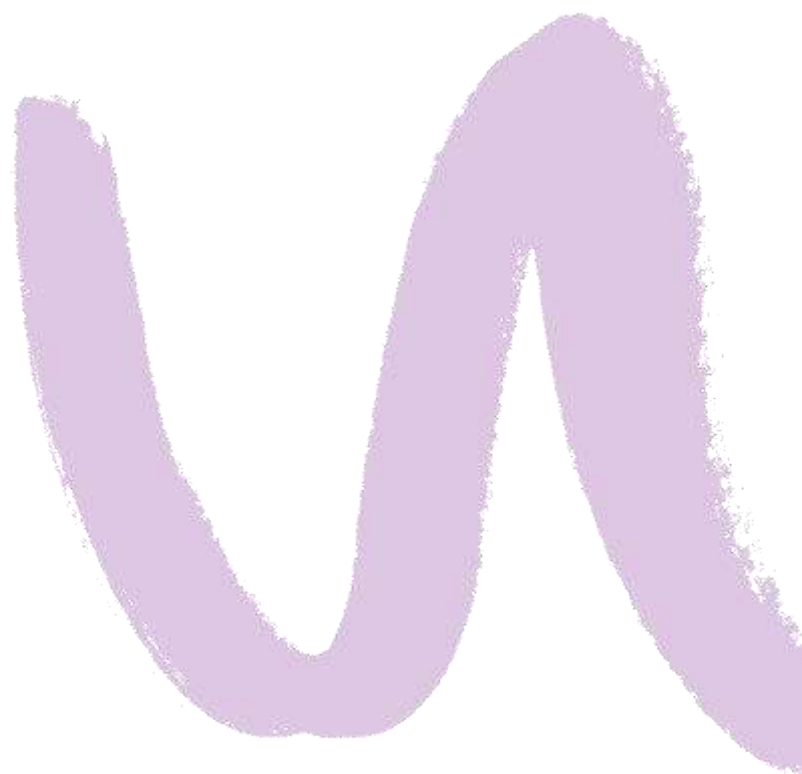
Promoting diversity and intersectionality

Interviewees also discussed the lack of demographic and social diversity within their own structures, including but not exclusive to black and ethnic minority women, migrant women, women with disabilities, and women from low income households. Most networks are working to become more inclusive spaces but they noted the difficulties of this for voluntary organisations. Given that membership of a political caucus is normally restricted to elected members, local government caucuses would find it particularly challenging to achieve diversity and intersectionality in light of the narrow profile of the average councillor.⁴⁰ For this reason, they should actively consult with groups representing the interests of under-represented and marginalised women and seek to make advances for them in local policy.⁴¹ A NTWF interviewee made this point in relation to the ability of a women's caucus to represent Traveller women when they are not in the room.

"Leave no women behind. All women need to be in a caucus. Our community is not there [in local government]. Who is not around the table? Women in politics tend to focus a lot on differences in political affiliations, but not about power imbalances within the group itself... Women's caucuses should do work on racism. Traveller women need convincing that the group will work for them. It is about creating opportunities for women and under-represented women".

40 NWCI, 2019

41 See also NWCI, 2019



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Establishing a women's caucus - Guidelines for Local Authorities

What is a Caucus

Women's caucuses or parliamentary groups are structures that have been created within political assemblies in many countries to strengthen cooperation between women in political life across party and ideological lines and which strengthens their capacity to effect change. They can help build the capacity of women councillors; especially newly elected councillors, through formal and informal mentoring and promote women's equality in Local Government. A women's caucus in your local authority should develop according to the specific histories, experiences, needs and resources in relation to women's participation and representation. Local authorities can assist with the establishment of such caucuses.

There are different models and types of caucus formal or informal, local regional or national.

Guidelines for establishing a Caucus:

The following are suggested guidelines for establishing a Caucus in a local authority – or where there are limited women councillors, among two or more local authorities - if there is an interest or desire among elected members.

Step 1 – Assess the environment

- Have women councillors expressed an interest and requested support?
- What resources financial and human can be provided?
- Contact active caucuses in other Local Authority areas for example Limerick City and County and Dublin City Council.
- Examine if local or regional civil society organisations have begun the process of developing a caucus and link with them to create a cohesive plan or additional supports you can provide.

Step 2 – Lay the foundations

- Invite and support all women councillors to take part in its formation.
- Where possible, provide support for women councillors to engage an independent facilitator to work with the members to define and agree the name, structure, format, vision and objectives.
- Discuss what practical and technical support can be offered for meetings times, space, IT and administrative support including an official email address provision or an official page on the Council website.

Step 3 – Getting up and running

- Will the secretariat role be undertaken by officials? If so, clearly define their role and limitations.
- Alternatively, explore how you the local authority can support engagement with civil society for example women’s groups in your area to provide for an independent secretariat (based on the Limerick model).
- Consider how will the caucus be renewed following an election and how can the Local Authority ensure institutional memory and the political experience of women? Will the secretariat role be undertaken by officials? If so, clearly define their role and limitations.
- Alternatively, explore how you the local authority can support engagement with civil society for example women’s groups in your area to provide for an independent secretariat (based on the Limerick model).
- Consider how will the caucus be renewed following an election and how can the Local Authority ensure institutional memory and the political experience of women?

Step 4 – In action

- Consider writing the existence of the caucus into your corporate plan.
- Decisions on activities should be based on the collective objectives of the caucus as determined by the members and could include the following;
 - Raise the visibility of the caucus by organising press conferences, media interviews and events.
 - Work with the caucus to sign up to the [European Charter for Equality between Women and Men in Local Life](#).
 - Funding allocations should be based on the expressed needs of the caucus members.
- Review funding to ensure successful functioning.
- Document and celebrate in official local authority communications, the achievements of the caucus.
- Ensure that the local caucus is maintained in the run-up to future general and local elections, where members may be running against each other and/or will be supporting their own party’s candidates.

Further resources

[Inter-Parliamentary Union – Guidelines for Womens Caucus](#)

[Irish Womens Parliamentary Caucus](#)

[NWC & NCCWN - Establishing Local Caucus for women councillors](#)

[Womens Democracy Network Uganda Chapter – Guide for creating and sustaining successful women local councilor’s caucuses at district and sub-county levels in Uganda](#)

Establishing a women's caucus – Guidelines for Women Councillors

What is a Caucus

Women's caucuses or parliamentary groups are structures that have been created within political assemblies in many countries to strengthen cooperation between women in political life across party and ideological lines. They can strengthen your capacity to effect change in communities and benefit both women and men. Through the exchange of ideas and individual experiences, they can benefit you in your role as a councillor and deliver for your community. It can help build the capacity of women councillors; especially newly elected councillors, through formal and informal mentoring from longer established councillors. Caucuses can also help bridge the gap between the formal political system and civil society.

Types of caucus – a formal or informal committee, local, regional or national.

Step 1 – Assess the environment

- Have women councillors expressed an interest?
- What resources financial and human will be needed?
- Consider the local context; the numbers of women councillors in your local authority and in neighbouring local authorities, if there is a small number of women.

Step 2 – Gaining support – Identifying any potential supporters or allies

- Are there active women's groups and networks in the area that can support your caucus or provide a secretariat role, as in the model adopted in Limerick? Consider what resources would be required.
- Are there women's civil society groups and groups representing marginalised communities that you can work in partnership with and strengthen links and cooperation with your caucus?
- Determine the relationship with the Local Authority. Inform them of your plans. Establish how they can support you with meetings times and spaces, IT and administrative support.
- Speak with caucuses that are up and running in Limerick City and County and Dublin City Council.
- Contact the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) who have formed a women's network.

Step 3 – Lay the foundations

- Establish a cross party and Independents preparatory group and clearly identify and delineate responsibilities.
- Invite and support all women councillors to take part in its formation.
- Consider engaging an independent facilitator initially to work with the members to define and agree the name, structure, format, vision and objectives.

- Explore themes that will unite women and where you can find common ground.
- Agree membership.
- Agree how meetings will work and how decisions will be made.

Step 4 – Getting up and running

- Consider launching the caucus with a joint press release or submitting a motion.
- Agree the leadership structure including chairperson and secretariat role (independent or provided by officials?) If an independent secretarial role is chosen, advocate for resources to support this.
- Decide who is eligible for membership and what the criteria are? Consider trans and non-binary inclusive language. What are the rights, responsibilities and obligations of being a member?
- How will the caucus be renewed following an election and how can you ensure institutional memory and embedding the political experience of women?
- Agree, formalise and publicise your rules or constitution. This should include, rationale, name, objectives, definition of membership, structures, process of decision making and conflict resolution, leadership, meetings, functions and resources. Discuss the development of a media and communication strategy as well as a Caucus email (linked to the council or independent) and social media platform.
- Make links with National Women’s Parliamentary Caucus.

Step – 5 In action

- Develop work plan for 6 – 12 months – what do you want to achieve?
- Decisions on activities should be based on the collective objectives of the caucus and could include: Identify specific policy issues that require deeper examination for example, violence against women and a safer public environment. Where

possible, collect data and conduct investigations to strengthen the advocacy impact of the caucus – and also to encourage buy-in from other decision makers.

- Outreach - Organise discussions among citizens and politicians on issues of importance and build networks– invite submissions, hold meetings, use existing structures such as the PPN.
- Raise the visibility of specific issues and the caucus by organising press conferences and media interviews.
- Promote your local authority signing up to the [European Charter for Equality between Women and Men in Local Life](#).
- Review funding to ensure successful functioning.
- Document and celebrate the achievements.
- Ensure that the local caucus is maintained in the run-up to future general and local elections, where members may be running against each other and/or will be supporting their own party’s candidates.

Further resources

[Inter-Parliamentary Union – Guidelines for Womens Caucus](#)

[Irish Womens Parliamentary Caucus](#)

[NWC & NCCWN - Establishing Local Caucus for women councillors](#)

[Womens Democracy Network Uganda Chapter – Guide for creating and sustaining successful women local councilor’s caucuses at district and sub-county levels in Uganda](#)

Womens Caucus Sample Constitution (State name and location)

1 **Vision, Mission and Values**

1.1 Vision

1.2 Mission

1.3 Values

(Name) Womens Caucus/Womens Committee and its members are committed to the following values:

2 **Aims and Objectives**

3 **Membership – Criteria and responsibilities**

Membership of (Name) Womens Caucus/Womens Committee is open to

4 **Working Arrangements**

4.1 Secretariat role

4.2 Elections, nominations and voting

5 **Meetings**

6 **Finances**

7 **Amending the constitution**

8 **Adoption of constitution**

This Constitution was adopted at a NAME Womens Caucus/Womens Committee meeting held on

Signed on behalf of NAME Womens Caucus/Womens Committee

Chairperson



National Women's Council

The National Women's Council's (NWC) mission is to lead and to be a catalyst in the achievement of equality for women. We are the leading national representative organisation for women and women's groups in Ireland. A non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation, founded in 1973, we seek to achieve equality for women. We represent and take our mandate from our over 190-member groups from across a diversity of backgrounds, sectors and geographical locations. We also have a growing number of individual members who support the campaign for women's equality in Ireland. Our mandate is to take action to ensure that the voices of women in all their diversity are heard. Our vision is of an Ireland and of a world where women can achieve their full potential in a just and equal society.

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**An Roinn Tithíochta,
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Department of Housing,
Planning and Local Government