



Women in Governance Focus Group
Greater Manchester
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Report

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The purpose of this Report

On the 4th of February, at the request of the Women Take Part research team, the Gender and Participation (GAP) Unit at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) conducted a focus group discussion with women in governance positions in the Greater Manchester area.

The Women Take Part is a national research project funded by the Government Equalities Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government. The research aims to increase awareness of the issues affecting women for engaging in governance as well as to make recommendations and communicate good practice. It is looking at what works and what needs to be done to promote the involvement of women, both formally and informally, in decision-making structures and in public life in general.

The purpose of the focus group session was to learn from the journeys, experiences and perceptions of women currently active in governance roles. We wanted to explore the main barriers, motivations and supports women have when getting involved and becoming active in civic and civil life. We also wanted to get the participants' ideas for ways to encourage and support other women to become more involved and take up similar roles.

The focus group report will supplement interviews carried out by other partners of the Women Take Part research. The discussion will also guide the GAP Unit in constructing a survey for use with other women in decision making positions in the North West and will contribute to its analysis of gender and public bodies - work funded by the North West Together We Can Network.

Participants

The focus group session was attended by six women: four local councillors from Manchester, Stockport and Tameside, a Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive director and an independent member of the Greater Manchester Police Authority. The participants brought an interesting variety of backgrounds to the discussion: three of them were Asian while the other three were white British; they had different ages, levels of education and household situations. All references to individuals have been deleted in the report.

We are very grateful to these six women for their participation.

How the focus group discussion was conducted

The focus group session was a two-hour discussion that took place at MMU Business School in Manchester.

Participants were asked a series of questions related to their experiences and perceptions (appendix A contains the question guide used). They had time individually to think about what had been asked before commenting on the topics one by one or in two groups. A general discussion was then opened up around each topic.

The session was structured around the following topics:

- Causes of women's under-representation in public life
- Getting into governance: motivations, barriers and elements that helped

- Being in governance: what it is like, difficulties, issues and key elements that support and help them in their public role.
- Recommendations for removing obstacles and encouraging more women to become involved in decision-making processes

We recorded the discussion using a tape recorder. A member of the GAP Unit sat in on the discussion and made detailed notes of what was said. We also collected written ideas prepared by the participants. All quotes from participants given in this report are verbatim.

The discussion revealed many similar experiences and perceptions among the participants, although, at times, an issue applied to one person only.

This report follows the same structure and order as the focus group. There were recurring themes – topics that came up more than once in response to different questions.

A. Introductions

We started the session by asking the participants to get into pairs and to introduce each other. They were also asked to say one word that described how they felt about being a woman in a male dominated field.

Their introductions showed a variety of backgrounds and personal situations that would enrich the discussion. In terms of family situations, for example, the group included a councillor and magistrate with a husband, grown-up children and grand-children; a young councillor who was recently married with no children and a single mother of four children. The four councillors were from Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Their ages and length of involvement in public life also varied. Some were newly elected while others had been councillors for over ten years.

Their ‘one word’ started to show the positives and difficulties of being a woman in governance:

- *hard*
- *ok*
- *powerful*
- *difficult, very difficult*
- *challenging*
- *exciting*

During the discussion they all stated that they liked being involved and active in public life. For some of them this has not been and is not easy.

“I like the life I’ve got now, I like being into politics. But the life I’ve got now has come at a price”

B. Causes of female under-representation in public life

We began by giving the participants a card containing information about women in public life in the UK (see below) and asking them to discuss in two groups what, in their opinion, are the key barriers to the appointment of women to positions of influence; what deters women from politics or public life commitments.

Women in public life – some facts

Women are still dramatically under-represented in key areas of public, political and economic life: the majority of public appointments, senior civil servants, members of the legal profession, directors of FTSE 100 companies, key actors in the media and individuals holding senior positions in our universities, are men - usually white men.

HANSARD SOCIETY, WOMEN AT THE TOP 2005

Some facts...

- Women are 9.8% of the senior judiciary
- 12% of police officers
- 10% of top business leaders
- 17% of national newspaper editors
- 19.5% of all MPs
- While 71% of local authority employees are women, relatively few make it right to the top: just 20.6% of chief executives are women
- In local government, where 27% of councillors in England and Wales are women, disproportionately few are council leaders - 13.8%
- BME women make up less than 1% of local councillors

SEX AND POWER: WHO RUNS BRITAIN? EOC 2007

According to the participants, there are a number of factors which constrain women's participation in public life and decision-making. Some of the key factors mentioned were:

- **Family responsibilities / traditional gender roles and expectations / burden of responsibilities in the home**

The participants highlighted the women's traditional role as carers and responsible for housework as one of the main barriers women face to become involved in governance.

"... You are a daughter, then you have a family, you are somebody's partner, you are somebody's mother, you have children then you're a mother – you are always in some other roles rather than your own... when women finish childcare they've got grandchildren"

"Childcare is a big barrier. Everybody expects us, the women, to care for other people... men appoint their wife to be the carer for their mum. Whether their wife wanted anything for herself or not, it doesn't matter ... the carers of the in-laws are their women."

Marriage and children, said the participants, impact women's involvement. Women continue to carry the primary responsibility for household and family. This role and the existing social expectations for women around it limit women's opportunities of becoming actively involved in public and political life.

"It is always the same...since you first get married you have to get in mind that there are certain things you've got to do...Be ready, you are a woman"

“You've got family, you have to sacrifice, and they (men) are not going to sacrifice their job”

“...and if the child is sick, it is you who take care of him or her not the man.”

“That is true, I mean, I worked from the time my child was 18 months old, but when the baby was ill, if the baby was ill, I was the one who took the leave.”

“Women are carers - they take it for granted”

“It will always be a problem for women to combine career and family life”

Domestic tasks, and the burden of responsibilities at home were also perceived by these women in governance as a significant barrier.

“... and also housework, I think we do the higher proportion of the housework...”

Although a young woman said she was challenging that in her home:

“I told my husband before we got married “do not expect me to come home to cook, I will cook if I have time, otherwise you cook, if you don't cook I feed myself and you do what you want”. And it's working so far...”

Another woman felt that only when she got divorced she found the freedom to become involved:

“I was a Stepford wife but that went with my divorce... a new life was born.”

“Being bereaved or divorced allows you to be a person in your own right.”

Women felt strongly that since women are still more burdened than men with household, children and family, they have to “juggle” and it is harder for them to combine and balance these domestic and family responsibilities with a career or a public job.

“The majority of independent women members of the police authorities are usually middle age retired people. They want more young mums to get their perspective but the fact is that most young mums have to work, they've got childcare responsibilities. Fitting in governance ... How on earth? How can they fit it in? It's the balance... family and children are barriers.”

•Lack of support

Another barrier mentioned by the participants was the lack of support women receive when venturing into improving themselves. They referred to lack of encouragement at home and from prospective employers or from their husband. The women believed that this lack of a supportive environment has an impact on the already low level of some women's self confidence.

“A lot of women don't realise what they are capable of because nobody tells them.”

“I was one of the top at grammar school but I was made to leave school at 15. Even though my teachers thought I should go to university, my parents said “no she is leaving, she is only a girl’ ... Just like that - we had no option”

“10 years ago if someone had said to me ‘would you like to become an MP?’ it would have been great, but nobody even raised that and said ‘are you confident?’ or ‘are you able?’ nobody said that to me.”

In the discussion, the lack of support was often linked to the views of traditional roles women are supposed to play.

“More women would get in trouble for not having had children than they would for not getting a job.”

•Lack of information

All the women considered that lack of knowledge and information was a key factor deterring women from becoming involved in public life. They pointed out that there was a lack of information about opportunities available, what is involved in civic participation, what to do to get involved and how things work when you are there. Some thought that the obstacles women face in obtaining the information they need were a way men have of controlling women. Governance remains dominated by white, middle-class men who know how the system works and don't want to give it up to others.

“Most councillors are old white men, still”

-I think a key factor is the lack of information as well,

-Oh yeah, yeah

- They don't give it to you, you've got to find it.”

This element, as well as others, was discussed again later in the session when women spoke about their experience of being in governance positions.

•Lower expectations / less focus

Linked to the lack of support and the traditional views of the female role, the participants expressed that another barrier was the low expectations of women themselves, the community and the wider cultural order. Some women, the participants expressed, have few interest and aspirations outside the family.

“Lack of expectations by women of themselves is a barrier... especially in working class people and Asian cultures”

“There is also the community expectation and the wider cultural expectations.”

Discussing the low expectations of women, one participant talked about most women not having focus; not looking ahead at the steps she'd need to take to achieve a goal – settling instead for something comfortable.

“We are in a job, and we say we are happy in that job, so that's fine because we've got to look after the children and do the house work, so we don't want to take on more stress looking for a job.”

The existence of low expectations was also mentioned in the field of education.

“A lot of women don't aspire to higher education.”

An Asian woman pointed out that she was encouraged by her family to study, to keep on top of her career, topping up her qualifications. It was what was expected from her.

In my experience I was encouraged all the way through... they said just do it, you are no different to a boy

A white British woman had the opposite experience and was stopped by her parents and people around her.

“I couldn’t get that. People always said to me ‘to educate a woman... you get nothing if you educate a woman’”

The participants stressed the importance of education of girls and woman.

“Even if a woman always stays at home, she is educating their children everyday”

“Mahatma Gandhi told us ‘you educate a woman, you educate a community’

-Yes, yes

-Absolutely

-It is true”

According to the participants, the expectations of others about what a woman should do can also affect women’s involvement.

“There are often conflicts of priorities. It can be difficult for women. Children have expectations of you, too.”

•Glass ceiling / competition

As women working in male dominated fields, some of them thought that competition from men and experiencing the ‘glass ceiling’ were one of the causes of women’s under-representation in the public sphere.

“We’ve got the glass ceiling. Men don’t want us to go any further. They make it very difficult.”

Overall, society continues to place women in the private sphere of the home and men in the public sphere as breadwinners. Some of the participants expressed that men resented women’s involvement in governance and in the workforce and would do what they could to stop getting women beyond a certain level.

“They feel women are competing in a man’s world. Because they are supposed to be the bread winners and women are now out there. So that is there as well, that’s a barrier. And men will do what they can, not in an awful way, but in their own way, to stop you from getting up there.”

“You are a threat when you start climbing. They let you come to there (a level), but once you start going there (higher position) they don’t like that... ‘you are not up here’ You are down there and they will support you, but go up here and they don’t want you there”

This idea of men’s competition and the glass ceiling was expressed by councillors but also by the women in other areas of governance like the police forces.

“I think it is true in the forces. The police force is very male oriented. There are lots of women sergeants, inspectors, almost fifty-fifty, but very few women ever get to the rank of division commanders like chief superintendents, there are far more men.

Why do they not ever go up the ranks if they are capable as everybody else?”

C. Getting into governance

We asked the participants to think back about the journey that led them to the governance positions they currently had. Individually, each woman had to think about the motivations they

had to become councillors, directors or senior officers of public services. They were also asked to list the key elements that helped them to reach those positions, as well as the things that initially put them off when considering getting involved, the obstacles they had to overcome.

They shared their experiences in two groups and each group filled a form recording the motivations, elements that helped and barriers faced. The table below presents the written ideas prepared by both groups.

Getting into governance		
Motivations	Key elements that helped	Main barriers faced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being ambitious • Filling a gap after children grew up • Sense of achievement • Wanting to be occupied with something that engages your brain • Give something back • Can-do attitude • Continue using existing skills • Grown up in this way • Wanting to make a difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family support • Friends' support • Role models • Being independent • Education • Assertiveness • Sense of your own value • Self-confidence, self-esteem • Determination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having to leave school at 15 because I was only a girl • Limited knowledge, information • Lack of money • Family-children- time • Seen but not heard • Men in community (Asian councillor) • Male dominated fields • Conflict of priorities: work/life balance

• **C.1 Motivations**

Keeping active / filling the gap

Two of the women mentioned the desire to keep active and use their skills and knowledge when reaching a stage of their lives when their main activity had stopped as their motivation. They wanted to be “*occupied in something that engages your brain.*” One of them had retired from her job and another’s children had left home. There was a gap in their lives and they wanted to fill it in by doing something productive.

“My main motivation is that I was going to early retirement and I wanted to keep active, really. To use a lot of the knowledge and skills I had acquired over many years. ‘I just cannot finish here, I need something to put that into’. That was what motivated me.”

“I always wanted kids. When I got them they were the centre of my life. When they all grew up and went, I felt this big gap. I had done lots of bits, and I thought ‘a councillor? I could do that’. I also had my daughter pushing, encouraging me: ‘Mum, you’re too intelligent to stay at home’”

Positive role models and supportive families

Several women expressed that role models were an important motivation for them to work, pursue a career and get a public job. They felt inspired by people in their families and in their communities.

“I just said it - role models – Shan (another woman councillor in her area). It’s a driving force. You look at them... When you live in the community you say ‘wow’”

“My dad was working class, he is my inspiration”

“...I also mentioned role models in relation to my mum who worked and studied and fought, taught her children to mind their own business, she was literally on the go from 7am until 11.30 at night for years and years. And I saw that if she could do it, I could do it too.”

“Yes, a role model in your mother makes a big difference”

A participant who was born and grew up in India mentioned that all the women she knew around her worked and most public figures were women, so for her the role models were all around. It was the way she was brought up.

I grew up at a time in India when Indhira Gandhi was the prime minister and to me it was the norm. All the people I knew...all senior doctors and directors of the medical establishment were women. Even the minister for nuclear industry was a woman. It was all I knew, they were all women. It was when I came to this country that I heard women can’t be ministers, women can’t be prime ministers, women can’t run hospitals. And I remember saying to my husband ‘God, you are way back in the dark ages’.

Being encouraged by other people

One of the women was approached by her MP, who asked her to be a parish councillor.

“If the MP hadn’t said it I would never have thought of it”

Others also mentioned people in senior positions or positions of power inviting women to get involved.

“In one area locally there is now a woman (in the highest police ranks)– thanks to the guy who does the selection – he is very open minded and looks purely at ability. Some men are good at looking out for talent.”

Ambition / determination

Ambition and the determination to overcome obstacles were among the things that motivated one of the participants to become a councillor and serve her community.

“I’ve got ambition. I think that that is what motivated me more. I had ambition and that pushed me through. It wasn’t easy. I had to fight a lot. But the higher the barriers, the more I fought.”

Making a difference and sense of achievement

To improve their communities, the city, and the satisfaction of getting things done motivated some of the women to get into politics.

“I wanted to make a difference. Be involved to make a difference.”

“My motivations are the sense of achievement that I get when I have done something. That feeling inside drives me to do other stuff.”

“I wanted to put something back”

•C.2 Key elements that helped

Role models and family support

The importance of people around them supporting and inspiring them was brought up again by the women at this point of the discussion. The presence of female role models in politics or active female figures in their families motivated the participants and helped them in their journeys to be in governance positions.

In their experiences, family support was fundamental. Support from fathers, mothers, husband and children, was mentioned in different occasions.

“I got selected in August and by January I wanted to give up. But my dad encouraged me.”

“My daughter encouraged me, ‘Mom get out there, do it’”

“Family support was another element that helped. Definitely”

Education

To be highly educated helped some of the women to have the skills and the knowledge required to get to the senior levels they are in now. It has also helped, according to one of the participants, to get more respect from men.

“Bringing in the intellectual side of things helps people to listen to you more. I’ve found that helpful. Men then think ‘she is not just a pretty face’ - that sort of thing.”

“Do you think it helps, getting respect?”

-Yes, getting respect.”

-You need to work hard to get their respect.

Opportunity

For some of the women in the session, the opportunity to become involved came at the right moment and they could grab it. Getting an opportunity at the right time helps ... and taking it.

“...Opportunity as well, the timing. I was going through a divorce when politics came along, and that changed my life.”

“I was going into early retirement... and had an interest already in the place, so that was an opportunity, and I took it.”

“...the opportunity comes, and suddenly you have to become aware that we are our own person, not somebody else’s. Here is the opportunity now for us to put our own ambitions forward, and do what we want to do. We have to take it.”

Economic independence

Some of the participants felt that being economically independent and their desire and determination not to depend financially on others helped them in their journey to go out, get a job and later become actively involved in public life.

“- I think that, again, something that helped me, was my desire not to be dependent financially on anybody else. I did not want to rely on somebody else giving me this or that. I wanted to work to get my shoes. That was a very strong motivation. To say ‘No, no, I have to support myself’.

- Absolutely

- Yes like having my own bank account. I went to work and I was earning as much as he was, so I had my own bank account. “

“Having a job and being economically independent helped to get later to the public sphere and all that.”

•C.3 Main barriers faced

Many of the barriers faced by the participants when engaging in governance were similar to those expressed at the beginning of the session when discussing the causes of women under-representation in decision-making processes. This time the obstacles mentioned were illustrated by personal experiences.

Gender discrimination and social stereotypes

Existing stereotypes about women's roles in society and the discrimination that can come out of them were barriers the participants faced. One of the women was made to leave school at fifteen because she ‘*was only a girl*,’ she was supposed to stay at home. For a young Asian councilor a similar pressure came from Asian men who criticised her on the grounds of her sex.

“I, during my election, faced barriers from men from my own community who felt that I shouldn’t be a public figure and that I should stay at home and be a housewife.”

Balancing family responsibilities and public life

Once again, family responsibilities appeared as one of the barriers to women’s governance positions. On the whole, during the session, participants portrayed a life of the female politician/public decision-maker as dominated by constant time pressures, stress and, in some cases, feelings of guilt. Much of this stress had to do with a battle of priorities between career and family. Some of them made it clear that family was their priority and took ‘a gap’ while raising the children.

“Not having latchkey kids was important to me – I wanted to be there for them.

I chose a seven year gap, but it was my choice. Being there for my children, that was my priority.”

“I also had to put my career back because I wanted to be with my children. I did not have a job left waiting for me. I took that choice then. For two years. But that meant I had to start again.”

“Making the choice is difficult, some people want both ways.”

“There are also emotional barriers. Talk about the children and guilt.”

- yes, I remember going to work and leaving my child at home. And lot of women made me feel bad for leaving my two year old... ‘how can you that!? leave a two year old!?’

Other barriers

The participants also referred to financial barriers, “*for a lot of women finances is the big barrier because they can’t afford it, think of working mums*” ; lack of information, “*It is there but you have to really seek it out. Nobody gives it to you.*”; and the lack of positive action in recruiting women and other under-represented groups, “*the way people are employed is quite restrictive. There is no positive action.*”

D. Being in governance

We asked the participants to reflect on and share their experiences of being a woman in governance. We wanted to know what kinds of difficulties you could face as a woman in a public role and what the key elements might be that support them in their jobs. To initiate this discussion on the difficulties they encounter we asked them: *How does it feel to be a woman in your particular field? Do you face particular problems that are related to being a woman?*

•D.1 Problems faced that are related to being a woman

The experiences varied. Some felt relatively positive about their jobs while other said they faced serious problems working in a male dominated field, such as the need to work harder, feeling physically tired, not being heard, or having to sacrifice social life.

Feeling positive

One of the participants who felt positive about her job was the member of the Greater Manchester Police Authority. She didn't feel she had to compete with men or that there was a glass ceiling limiting her. The existence of a good percentage of women on the board and the expertise they have brought with them, which has been recognised by the men, were the reasons why, in her opinion, men and women were working as equals in her job.

When I first joined it was very male-dominated but fortunately the new independents are women so we've got far more women now, not yet 50% but not very far off. And we've got more women in senior positions: three women are chairs which were always chaired by men before. So we don't have to compete or anything. But I think it's because of the expertise that we've brought with us and more male colleagues are starting to recognise what we've got to offer. Two or three years ago they may have found us as a bit of a threat, but they have now realised that we can actually work well together. So I consider myself quite fortunate in the Police Authority. I don't feel that there is a glass ceiling there. But I cannot speak for any other women in the police force.

Another woman, who had been the first female maths lecturer in a college, said she had enjoyed it and felt quite spoiled: *"They carried my bags..."* This was somehow challenged by others in the group *"I feel that's not about equality, is it?"* *"Isn't it patronising?"*

One of the councillors felt quite positive about her job:

"I feel that it is quite exciting, powerful, to be a councillor. I feel more equal with the men, at the council, with other councillors"

However she also expressed that sometimes she felt left out by men who gang up and who could be *"very bitchy"*

Problems related to being a woman

Women need to work harder

Talking about their experiences in their role, some of the women expressed that they needed to work harder than men in order to be able to compete.

"As a woman you've got to be more effective and work much harder to make yourself to that level, to be equal to men. Having got to that male dominated place you have to work even harder to be equal to them, because it is a man's world. Just see at the statistics. We have to work that much harder to break through that glass ceiling."

An Asian councillor felt that being a woman with a brown face, she needed to work harder to others to be considered equal not only by men but also by other women. A woman with a brown face is a ‘double whammy’.

“...even with other women to be equal, you have to work that much harder to be equal as a brown face. Because what they see is the brown face. They don’t see that you are capable.”

Not being heard / ideas taken by men

Two of the councillors reported that many times their ideas were ignored and only minuted and discussed when said by a man and not when they had said them.

“I do not feel equal to men. How can I feel like that? If when we have a meeting I could come up with a very good idea, a very good suggestion, but it is sort of ignored. And a man comes up with the same suggestion and that’s minuted it and taken in because the man has said it. The credibility is given to the man. And some times I think ‘it’s alright, they are doing it, they are doing what I wanted to do’ but it has come through the man. And that is happening a lot. I don’t think we are equals there. I think that the men dominate. The men dominate every time.”

“They’ve done it to me. Some of them try to do it and I say ‘no, that was my idea’. You’ve got to be assertive and say ‘I’m sorry, I had that idea’. Yes, you do get that an awful lot. Men take the credit for doing something you’ve done or said. But if I’d done it, I would take credit for it. I’d say ‘No, that was me, that’s mine’.”

Male-dominated atmosphere / men networks

Some of the councillors stressed that their jobs were male-dominated and women were marginalised from information and decisions. Men, participants agreed, tend to built up networks men and leave women out.

“They dominate the meetings and they leave you out. They set rules and then go to another room. And you have to go and find them back. Three will often get up and go into another room to network.”

“...when I was first elected ... I was made feel quite welcome as equal by the women. But men, if I asked they told me. But sometimes they gang up on me. They have their own meetings and they don’t tell me about it. They arrange things and you don’t really know about it.”

“They also expect me to do what they do as if I had the same freedom and time available [which as a single mother, I don’t]”

Loneliness and social sacrifices

Linked to the need to work harder, and not having the networks men have at work, the problem of feeling lonely and tired was raised by one of the participant.

“My experience it is lonely, it is lonely without doubt. And I have also found it physically quite tiring just working at the level I am. The other thing is that, as a woman I find I have to sacrifice things that I normally would like as a woman, and one of these is social life. I just cannot sustain the social life that I would like to. I just have not got the time or the energy to do that. And that I do miss. And I recognise that. And the other one as I said is just physical energy. Because you know, you get home and you think ‘I’ve got another three things to do’. I could really do with a bath, I’m ready to go to bed, but I just think of the things I have to do and go on working, that is how it feels. And there are times when I think ‘wouldn’t it be nice to just not have this pressure and be a woman who lunches’. It feels like this, just having hard work, exhausting.”

Most of my friends also work and I can't see them at lunch time and I can't sort of just mobile them after work and have a drink with them. I have to travel to wherever they are to get to see them and it is hard. I do miss that. You see, because men have social networks at work. They actually satisfy their social needs at work."

The rest of the group agreed.

Reflecting on this reality of under-representation and the problems derived from a male-dominated culture in public life, one of the women expressed that that could not be changed.

"How many leaders of councils are female? How many chairs of police authorities are female? Very few, very few...and we don't take pleasure from that. And those sensible men out there who like these clever women around them, how many would take all their ideas and make them their own?"

You cannot change that.

I think that as women we've got to realise that we can't force our way into their system, particularly at the police, I think, we cannot force the way. What we can do is work hard and be aware that some of these barriers are there ..."

D.2 Things that help and sustain

We asked the participants for the key elements that support and sustain them in their public roles. Among the things mentioned were family support, feeling valued, liking the job, mentoring, other women there, can-do attitude, being assertive and getting things done.

Family support

Family support appeared again as an important element that helps them to be where they are. This support was expressed as moral support, as in the example of a young councillor who received support and encouragement from her father when things became difficult or the participant whose daughters praised her work; as well as practical support such as having your mother getting dinner ready if you'll be late (reflecting again, in this case, that most of these women carry the burden of family obligations).

"...my mother is over 80 now and sometimes I rely on her support. The days I'm running late, I phone her and tell her 'please can you have dinner ready because I'm running very late' and she does, because she knows what is like to be a woman and work."

Liking the job

"I love the job. It is exciting. Even when it is difficult, I like it because I can stand up. I have been a councillor for 10 years and I know the job so well. I like it".

"... I have worked 14 hours a day and I don't get paid that much, I don't get an allowance, but because we enjoy the job, we give it, we give it all our time and energy."

Feeling valued

"For me it's also that I do feel valued. In our case, the job at the police is not really political, we've actually stopped all that, because we used to have it. Now we are not supposed to be political anyway, and I think it is good. And I feel quite valued, and that what kicks me. "

Mentoring

"I think mentoring is helpful. Like when you have a new councillor to learn where to go, what to do...it hasn't been brought forward, this mentoring idea...the magistrates do have mentors

and that have helped. If you are a new magistrate you are assigned to a mentor while being trained.”

Other women

Having other female colleagues has been positive in different ways. Some have felt direct support and solidarity from other women, others think that having more women in senior positions has made the work easier and allowed collaboration between men and women.

“... My experience was that every woman made me feel so welcome when I was first elected. I asked for everything I wanted.”

Results

“When things are done, results, tangible things”

“The satisfaction each time you achieve something e.g. a park for the kids, makes you want to go on and do the next thing”

Can-do attitude, determination, assertiveness

“Determination I had to fight a lot. But the higher the barriers the more I fought.”

“Things that help? being assertive. I was assertive enough to sort of to know that I had to do it the right way rather than be aggressive. To be assertive, lot of little things”

Role models

Participants referred to having role models as inspiration but also being themselves role models to others.

“Another thing that is a force is to be a role model for others ...I have helped supporting my daughters to reach for their aspirations and for them to be whatever they want to be.”

“I was at the young women’s forum, a couple of years ago, and one of the young girls said ‘I wish to be like you, I want to be councillor’ and I thought ...Oh my goodness”.

E. Recommendations

We closed the discussion by asking participants if they had any suggestions about what should be done to remove the obstacles that prevent women from reaching senior positions and to encourage women to become involved in decision-making processes.

Among the recommendations made were:

- Help raise expectations and aspirations of girls and women
- Give them confidence in what they want to do ... *you can do it*
- Build confidence: debate, education
- Build their confidence to want to put themselves forward and to know what is needed in order to achieve that. They need to know what it would involve.
- Develop self-confidence in women through community groups, schools, etc
- Let women be and do whatever they want to
- Encourage young people to get involved
- Make young people aware they are not powerless... *you can make changes*

- Make politics attractive
- Publicise it more
- Promotional materials aimed at girls

- Promotional materials re: public services in school, community venues, etc
- Improvements in citizenship education for young people and for girls
- Importance of education from an early age
- Importance of economic independence and of being more ambitious
- Education in school to suggest to girls that the sky is the limit if they want it to be
- Positive actions
- Mentoring
- Enjoy the job you do
- Practical issues such as meetings at the right time – might be different times
- Good female role models. Provide them role models of women in power.
- Make role models more visible e.g. go to schools
- More women out there as role models. That gives the message ‘they are women and are there you are a woman you can do it as well.

Other comments were:

“Let women be what they want to be.... army, chief exec, mother... They shouldn’t feel under pressure to stay at home OR have a career.”

“I feel women sometimes confuse confidence with aggression. They need to know about being assertive.”

“Women need to recognise that in every job you have to do uncomfortable things and you need to learn to do difficult things (i.e. not hand them over to a man) – this is linked to confidence.”

“Things need to be challenged but it has to be the right person doing the challenging for it to be successful – for example, it’s easier for a Muslim to challenge Muslim men. You should try to target the group you are trying to get to.”

Appendix A: Women in Governance Focus Group – Question Guide

A. Women under-representation in public life

1. Please mention **3** factors which in your opinion contribute to the under-representation of women in key areas of public life (see table below)

What are the key barriers to the appointment of women to positions of influence? What is that keeps women from committing themselves to politics or public life commitments?

Women are still dramatically under-represented in key areas of public, political and economic life: the majority of public appointments, senior civil servants, members of the legal profession, directors of FTSE 100 companies, key actors in the media and individuals holding senior positions in our universities, are men - usually white men.

HANSARD SOCIETY, WOMEN AT THE TOP 2005

Some facts...

- Women are 9.8% of the senior judiciary
- 12% of senior police officers
- 10% of top business leaders
- 17% of national newspaper editors
- 19.5% of all MPs
- While 71% of local authority employees are women, relatively few make it right to the top: just 20.6% of chief executives are women
- In local government, where 27% of councillors in England and Wales are women, disproportionately few are council leaders: 13.8%
- BME women make up less than 1% of local councilors

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B. Getting into governance

2. What motivated you to become a [councillor, director of Stockport PCT etc.]?

3. What were the key elements that helped you reach that position?

4. Were there any things that put you off initially when considering getting involved? What obstacles have you had to overcome? (structures, practice, attitudes)

C. Being in governance

5. How does it feel to be a woman in your particular field? Do you face particular problems that are related to being a woman?

6. What are the key elements that support you and sustain you in your public role?

D. Recommendations

7. What could be done to remove the obstacles that prevent women from reaching senior positions and to encourage women to become involved in decision-making processes?

8. Is there anything else you would like to say?