Leadership & Gender in Local Government 2009

Contents

Introduction

This is the third edition of the Centre for Women & Democracy's examination of the numbers of women in the most senior leadership roles in local government in England.

Local authority leaders are amongst the most high profile and visible individuals in their own communities, speaking for towns, cities and counties at local, regional and national level, negotiating with central government for funding and support and appearing in the local media. They are the public face of their councils – if the person in the street recognises any local politicians at all, it is likely to be the MP and/or the council leader.

Despite changes in the responsibilities of local government, and a commonly-held view that their functions are diminishing, councils remain responsible for delivering a significant number of services to local people. These include education, some aspects of road and transport policies, planning, environmental services, and social services. Local authorities are often the largest local employer, particularly of part-time workers, and offer many career opportunities to local people.

In addition, there are a number of other developments which impact on the overall leadership profile. There are currently very few elected mayors, but there may well be more in the future. The merger of small authorities into large unitaries, and the growing trend for authorities to join together to provide service, are also factors which affect the make-up of leadership teams.

The question of who leads local authorities is of importance. There have been a number of schemes to investigate and improve the presence of under-represented groups in councils as a whole, and in parliament, yet relatively little detailed information about the make-up of the 361 local authority leaders. The Centre for Women & Democracy's annual report on leadership and gender in local government is a step towards rectifying this.

September 2009
Leeds

Women in Local Government in England

Currently, 30% of local councillors in England are women[1]. This figure has been static for some years, and shows no sign of increasing in the near future.

The vast majority of councils use the political structure of indirectly elected leader plus cabinet or executive composed of between six and ten portfolio-holders. There are also a number of chairs of scrutiny committees. In 2006, approximately 25% of portfolio-holders were women, and 25% of scrutiny chairs[2]. 8% of cabinets were all male[3]. Recent unpublished surveys by the Centre for Women & Democracy suggest that the percentage of women portfolio-holders may have increased by about 1% between 2006 and 2009, and the number of all-male cabinets has decreased slightly.

At the next level up, 23% of deputy leaders are women (15% in 2006[4]), and 13% of leaders.

Specific groups of women - e.g., from BME communities - remain even more seriously under-represented. There are no available statistics for the age profile of members at these levels, and none for other issues such as disability.

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[1] IDEA *Census of Councillors 2008*, Centre for Women & Democracy's *Local Elections Reports 2007, 2008 and 2009*
[2] Catherine Bochel & Hugh Bochel, *Women 'Leaders' in Local Government in the UK, 2008*
[3] Ibid
[4] Ibid

Women Leaders

In July 2009, 13% of local authority leaders in England were women, compared with16% in 2008, 14% in 2007[5], 15% in 2006[6] and 10% in 2001[7].

Women are most likely to lead unitary authorities (18%) or shire districts (15%), and least likely to lead metropolitan authorities (3%).

In terms of geography, women are most likely to lead authorities in the East of England (23%) and least likely to lead authorities in the North East (no women leaders at all), Yorkshire or the North West (5% each).

The two charts which follow show the distribution of women leaders.

Chart 1: Distribution of Women Leaders by Type of Authority

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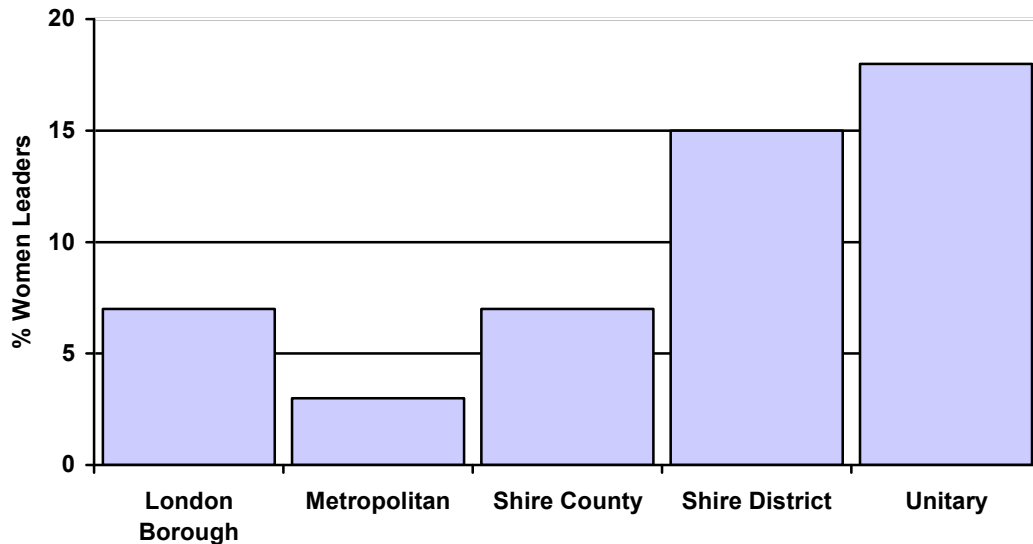
[5] *Leadership & Gender in Local Government in England Parts 1 and 2,* Centre for Women & Democracy 2007 and 2008
[6] Bochel & Bochel, *Women 'Leaders' in Local Government in the UK*
[7] Bochel & Bochel, *'Modernisation or Backward Step? Women Councillors and New Decision-Making Structures in Local Government* Local Government Studies Vol 30, 2004

Chart 2: Distribution of Women Leaders by Region

This pattern is more or less the same as that identified in our studies of 2007 and 2008, although the abolition of 38 authorities on 1 April 2009 has had a clear effect which will be examined further on.

Women are most likely to be councillors in London boroughs (36%) and least likely in shire counties (26%). In terms of region they are most likely to be found in London (36%) and least likely in the East Midlands (25%)[8].

Chart 3: % Women Leaders and Councillors by Type of Authority

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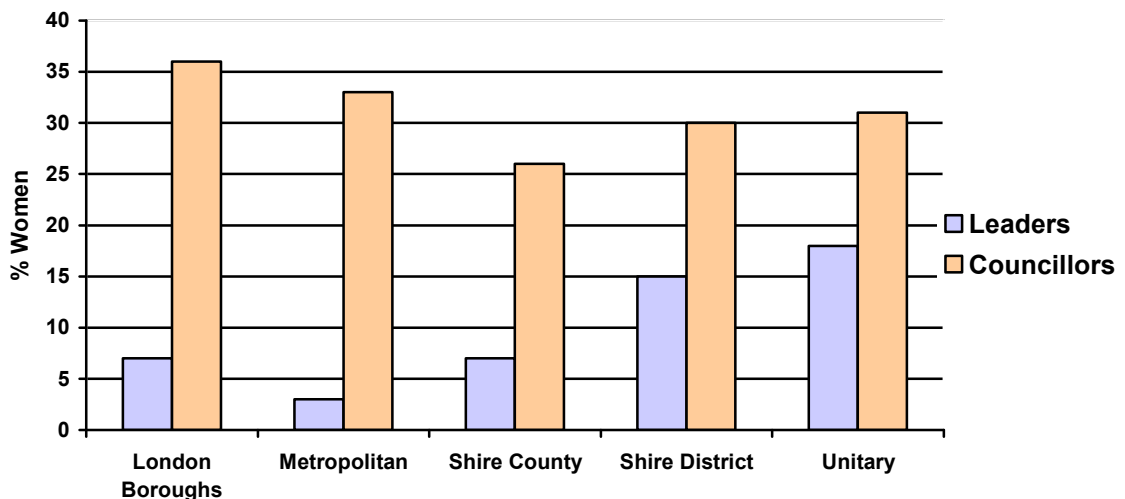
[8] IDEA *Census of Councillors 2008*

The discrepancies between the percentages of women councillors and the percentages of women leaders in some types of authority are striking, and would warrant further investigation. There are some grounds for suggesting that there may be a relationship between the geographic size of an authority and the percentage of women councillors, with women most likely to be elected to authorities with small 'travel to town hall' areas, or areas with relatively good or accessible public transport and least likely to be elected to those with poor public transport or with large 'travel to town hall' distances[9]. However, the pattern for women leaders seems to be different, and possible reasons for this do not present themselves easily.

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[9] This possible relationship is explored further in the Centre for Women & Democracy's report on the 2009 local elections

Leadership Changes in 2009

Between July 2008 and July 2009 there was a change of leader in a total of 48 authorities. In addition, 43 shire districts and counties were abolished and replaced with 9 new 'super unitaries', resulting in a reduction in the total number of council leaders from 375 to 339. One of the new unitaries - Bedford - has an elected mayor, and during the course of the year Stoke-on-Trent reverted from an elected mayor to a leader and cabinet system, bringing the total number of council leaders to 340.

Leaders became or ceased to be leaders for a number of reasons, the principal of which were:

- changes of political control following local elections in June 2009 (or by-elections during the preceding year)
- internal changes, i.e., the resignation or 'standing down' of leaders, or the failure of leaders to get re-elected by their political groups
- structural changes to local authorities, i.e., the abolition of existing authorities and creation of new ones

a) Changes in Political Control

A total of 16 authorities changed hands during 2008/9 - the majority as a result of electoral fortunes, and a small number as the consequence of re-negotiated deals in councils with no overall control.

Three of the outgoing[10] and two of the incoming[11] leaders were women. One of the outgoing leaders - Hazel Harding in Lancashire - also lost her seat.

Because local elections took place in a relatively small number of local authorities in 2009 (2 districts, 27 shire counties and 5 new unitaries), comparatively few authorities saw changes in leadership as a result of change of control.

b) Internal Changes

28 new leaders took office between July 2008 and July 2009 as a result of factors other than changes caused by electoral fortunes. 7[12] outgoing and 3[13] incoming leaders were women.

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[10] Bristol, Lancashire and Somerset
[11] Bristol and Nottinghamshire
[12] Calderdale, Horsham, Malvern Hills, Milton Keynes, Stafford, Trafford and Woking

For both men and women, there were a variety of reasons for these changes. In many, the incumbent stood down for personal or health reasons, or because they felt that they had done the job for long enough. A number arrived at that decision after being under pressure over various other issues. Three resigned because they were also parliamentary candidates and wished to concentrate on their General Election campaigns. One ceased to be leader by default when he defected from the Conservative Party to Labour, and another resigned following obscenities (not posted by him himself) appearing on his social networking site. One (man) took a job abroad, and one (woman) moved away with her husband when he got a new job. One lost his seat in the elections, and at least two were removed following coups within their own groups. 23 of the 28 are still members of council, some as portfolio holders and some as backbenchers.

There is no significant difference in the pattern of the reasons for change, with both men and women citing similar reasons[14].

All of the retiring/resigning/ousted women leaders were replaced by men, and all three of the new women leaders succeeded male colleagues.

c) Structural Changes

Current government policy is that, wherever possible, there should be a single tier of local government, as there is in London and the metropolitan authorities.

A total of 43 shire district and county councils ceased to exist on 1 April 2009, and were replaced by 9 new 'super-unitary' authorities - Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester, Cornwall, County Durham, Northumberland, Shropshire and Wiltshire. Of these, Bedford has an elected mayor, and is therefore not included in this section, and the remainder have a leader and cabinet/executive.

The two new Cheshire authorities, together with Durham and Northumberland, had held their inaugural elections in 2008, but did not come into formal existence until 2009. The remainder held their first elections in June 2009. As a consequence, it is now possible to assess what effect this reorganisation has had on the number of women leaders in these areas.

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[13] Brentwood, Dudley and Haringey
[14] These reasons were identified through council websites, press releases and local newspapers. They are not therefore the result of interviews, and, since they represent a 'public line' may not always be entirely accurate.

Eleven (26%) of the abolished authorities had women leaders. Two of these - Jane Scott in Wiltshire and Patricia Turner in Mid Bedfordshire - have become leaders of new unitaries (Wiltshire and Central Bedfordshire). Two of the male leaders of the former authorities are also leaders of new ones - Simon Henig in County Durham, and Jeff Reid in Northumberland. The leaders of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Cornwall and Northumberland were all new, and all male.

Women are therefore represented comparatively well in terms of leadership of the new authorities.

Of the outgoing 11 women leaders, 5 (45%) are no longer councillors, as against 11 of the outgoing 32 men (34%).

One of the new councils – Cheshire East – has an all male cabinet.

27% of councillors elected to the nine new authorities were women; 29% of women in the authorities which were abolished were women. In both cases this is below the national average of 30%.

<u>Recommendation 1</u>

Where two-tier systems are being replaced by new single-tier authorities, thought should be given as to how the percentage of women councillors can be either maintained or increased. New councils should not be allowed to have all-male cabinets/executives, and there should be monitoring by the relevant bodies of progress.

Political Parties

70% of women council leaders are Conservatives; this reflects both the type of authority and the region in which women are most likely to lead. It also reflects the electoral fortunes of the party over the last few years.

13% of Conservative leaders are women, 15% of Labour, and 12% of Liberal Democrat.

The graph in Chart 3 shows how the proportion of women leaders from all three of the main parties has fallen since 2006[15]. The dramatic fall in Liberal Democrat women leading local authorities is striking, whilst Labour has returned to 2006 levels and the Conservatives show a small but sustained increase.

Chart 3: % Council Leaders by Party, 2006-2009
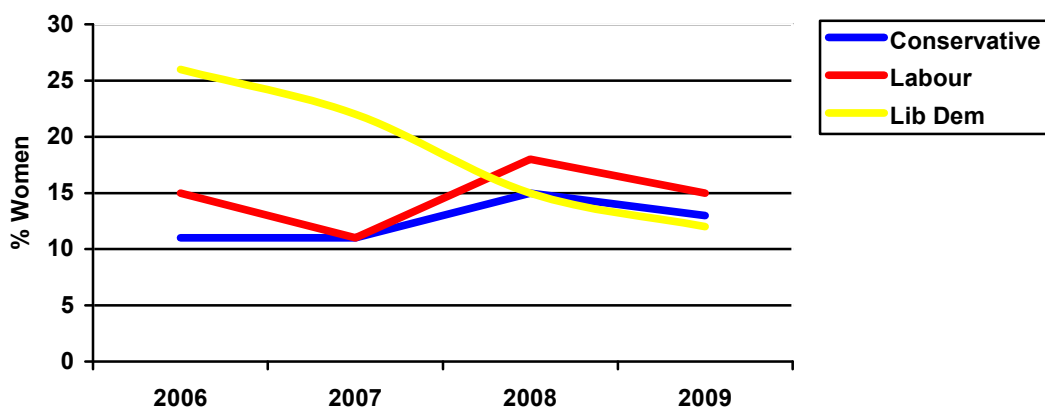
Where a party has taken control following electoral success, the new leader will have been one chosen by his/her party whilst still in opposition. Most research carried out to date has tended to concentrate on leaders in power, and there is therefore no real understanding of whether or not being in or out of power affects the outcomes of leadership elections, and, if so, how.

None of the political parties are known to have any specific targets or strategies aimed at increasing the number or percentage of women leaders, although the Labour Party does require the composition of cabinets and shadow cabinets to reflect the composition of the Council Labour Group.

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[15] 2006 figures quoted by Bochel and Bochel, *Women 'Leaders' in Local Government in the UK*, 2007, 2008 and 2009 figures from CFWD local election reports.

The research advocated in Recommendation 5 of this report should include work on these issues.

Recommendation 2

Political parties should be encouraged to match their undoubted commitment to increasing diversity with action to make it happen. In particular, they should produce guidelines for local council groups which require them to consider relevant representational issues when filling cabinet and shadow cabinet positions, so that the possibility of cabinets filled entirely by white men[16] is eliminated.

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[16] See P ??

Deputy Leaders

310 local authorities are known to have deputy leaders in 2009. Of these, 23% are women – an increase of 3% on 2008.

However, the actual number of women deputies – 70 – is identical, and the percentage increase has therefore been caused entirely by the reduction in the number of authorities..

There are five authorities in which both the leader and the deputy are women – these are Brentwood, Derby, Haringey and South Northamptonshire, as well as Brighton and Hove, which has two deputies, both of whom are female.

There are 202 authorities in which both the leader and deputy (in the case of three authorities both deputies) are male.

There are four authorities – Eden, Manchester, Sandwell and Sefton – where the leader is male and there is one male and one female deputy.

A comparison of the incidence of women leaders and deputies by type of authority produces an interesting picture, as do similar exercises by region and party. Overall, women seem to be more likely to be deputy leaders in types of authority and parts of the country where women leaders are rare. They are also less likely to be deputies where women lead.

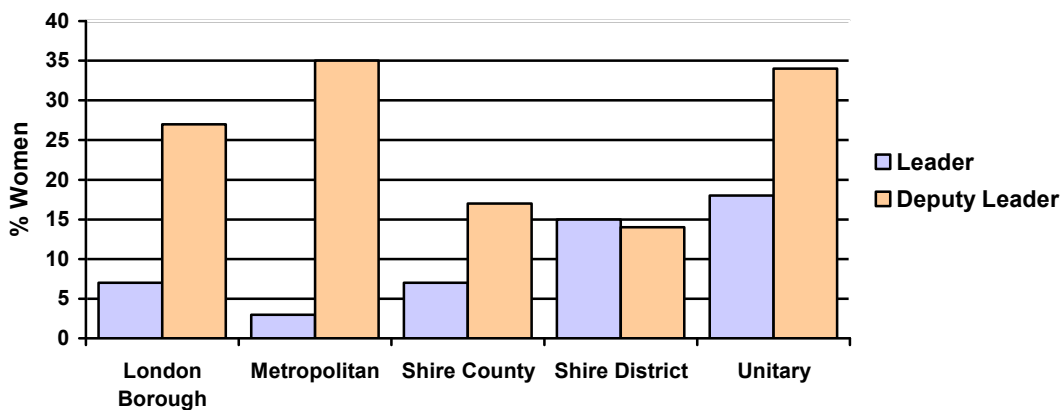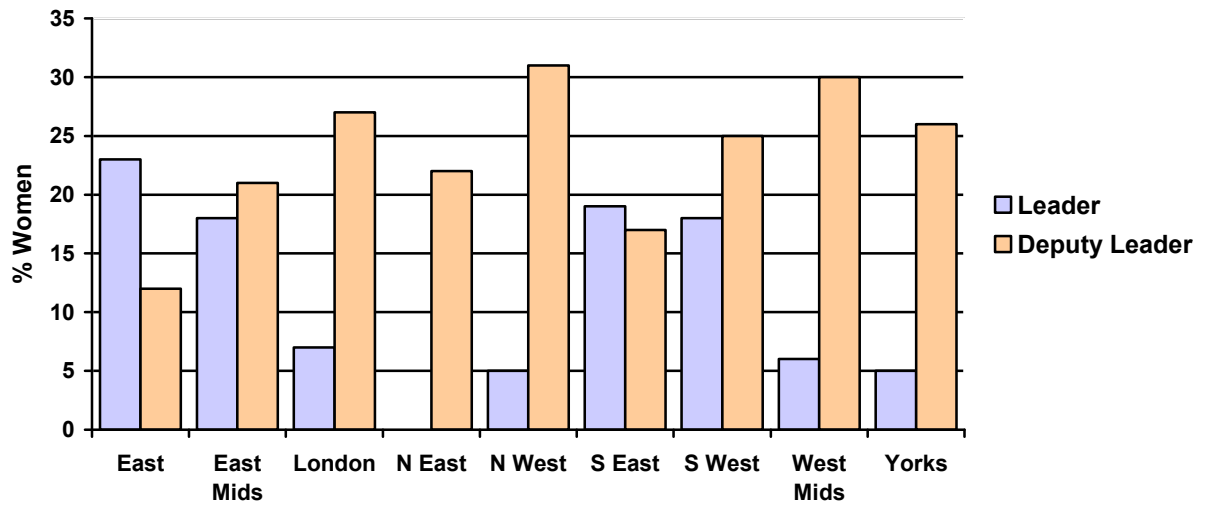**Chart 4: % Women Leaders and Deputy Leaders by Type of Authority**

Chart 5: % Women Leaders and Deputy Leaders by Region

Chart 6: % Women Leaders and Deputy Leaders by Political Party
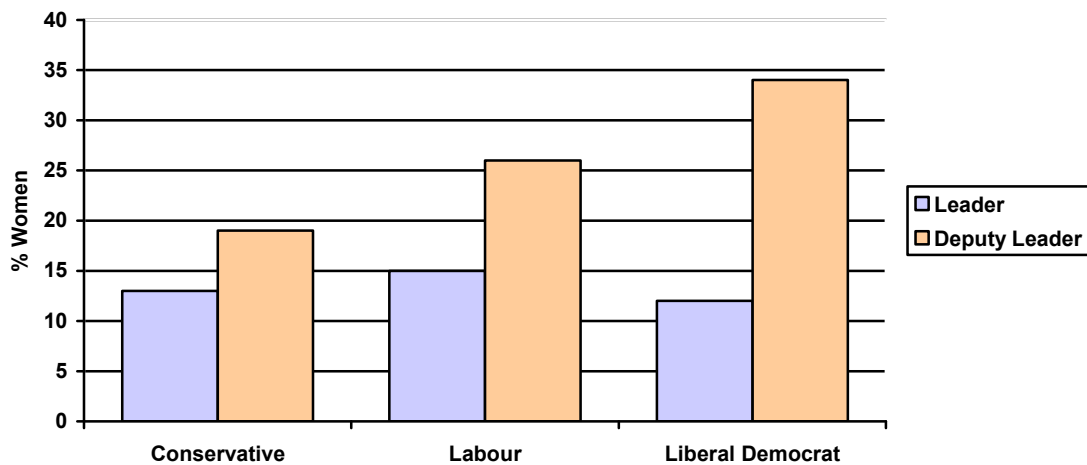
There is currently no data to show the frequency with which deputy leaders succeed to leadership. Some individuals are better deputies than leaders; other will seek election as a deputy in order to be in the best position to become leader at a later date. Work on deputy leadership should be included in the research proposed in Recommendation 5 of this Report.

Elected Mayors

There are a total of 12 elected mayors in England, two of whom are women[17]. In 2007 and 2008 there was only one woman elected mayor.

Women are less likely to stand as mayoral candidates than as councillors. Table 2 shows the percentage of women candidates overall in authorities with mayoral elections since 2005; the average level of women candidates in local council elections is 30%. It should be noted that the very small number of mayoral elections means that relatively small variations in the number of women candidates between one year and the next can lead to quite large swings year on year. However, it is clear that, after a low start when mayoral elections began, women are as likely to stand in these elections as in those for councillors.

Table 1: % Women Candidates at Mayoral Elections 2005-2009

Year	Authorities	Total % Women Candidates
2005	Doncaster, Hartlepool, North Tyneside, Stoke-on-Trent	16%
2006	Hackney, Lewisham, Newham, Watford	23%
2007	Bedford, Mansfield, Middlesbrough	29%
2009	Doncaster, Hartlepool, North Tyneside	30%

However, women are less likely to be fielded as mayoral candidates by the main political parties. In the three sets of mayoral elections between 2006 and 2009, 20% of Conservative candidates were women, 20% of Labour and 33% of Liberal Democrats; in all three cases these percentages are well below levels of other types of elections. Mayoral candidates are usually selected by local party members, and to date there has been relatively little work done to establish whether or not the procedures used have any provision for the need to increase diversity.

It should be recognised that political parties have a number of problems in terms of ensuring some gender balance for mayoral candidates, most notably that mayoral elections occur in a piecemeal fashion with no relation to one another, and that sitting

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[17] Dorothy Thornhill in Watford and Linda Arkley in North Tyneside, (the latter elected in 2009)

mayors are always likely to be re-selected to stand again, and are likely to be re-elected.

Any increase in the number of women mayors is therefore difficult to achieve and very slow, unless political parties take a positive decision to field more women candidates in places they can reasonably expect to win, or unless more women stand as independent candidates where independents stand a real chance of winning.

It should also be noted, however, that mayoral elections are more prone to result in the election of independent or other candidates – of the 12 current mayors 4 (Bedford, Hartlepool, Mansfield and Middlesbrough) are independents and 1 (Doncaster, where the new mayor is an English Democrat) is from a smaller party.

<u>Recommendation 4</u>

Research should be undertaken to examine the political parties' selection procedures for mayoral candidates (other than London) with a view to establishing (at least) the processes used, the guidance given to those making the selections, and the degree to which the issue of diversity is taken into account. This research should include the examination of recent selection procedures and interviews with candidates.

Routes to Leadership

Local authority leaders achieve their office by one of two basic routes. Either they are elected (usually annually) by the controlling political group on the council and then formally elected by the council as a whole, or, in hung councils, they are elected by their political group and then emerge as the leader of council following negotiation between competing groups. In a very small number of cases, Independents emerge as leaders in hung councils, although they often do so as the acknowledged (if not elected) leader of an Independent grouping.

Elected mayoral candidates are either fielded by political parties, or stand as self-selecting independents, and are then voted for by the electorate of their local authority area. Most political parties have formal selection procedures, generally involving member ballots, although these may be less structured in the case of smaller parties. Independent candidates may or may not stand with the support of local community groups, and may or may not have gone through some form of adoption or approval process.

In the case of leaders, the electorate selecting them is both very small and closed. It is also likely to be above average in terms of age (the average age of councillors now being 59[18]), and below average in terms of the representation of gender and, in most areas, BME communities (and certainly BME women).

Elections within political groups are usually by secret ballot, and to date there has been very little work done to examine the process by which councillors arrive at the decision as to who to vote for. This will doubtless be influenced by a number of conscious factors – the programmes of the candidates, promises made (or not made) about preferment, or political or personal friendships – but may also be less consciously swayed by perceptions of what constitutes leadership, what qualities a 'good' leader should possess, and the background circumstances in which such decisions are made.

There is also relatively little understanding of the routes into leadership – what pattern of portfolio-holding predominates, for instance, or what levels of experience are most likely to succeed. It is usually assumed that women are more likely to hold the 'caring' portfolios, and this is borne out by existing research[19], but it is not known that this is necessarily a bar to leadership (although it may well be). If leaders are seen as

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[18] IDEA *Census of Local Councillors 2008*
[19] Bochel & Bochel, *Women 'Leaders' in Local Government in the UK'* 2007

corporate managers rather than the drivers of service delivery, then experience in corporate portfolio areas may well be critical, and women would therefore find themselves in a disadvantaged position from the start. But it may also be the case that councillors view necessary leadership qualities differently depending on whether or not they are in control – a group selecting anew leader whilst in power, for instance, may be looking for a corporate manager, whilst one selecting in opposition may want someone who is strong on service delivery and therefore able to act – or be perceived as acting – as an advocate for the electorate.

Equally, there appears to be very little – if any - information is the selection processes used by political parties to select mayoral candidates, or the process by which independent candidates (some of whom are eventually elected) decide to stand. Given that four elected mayors in July 2009 were independents (Bedford[20], Hartlepool, Mansfield and Middlesbrough), and a fifth was from a minor party (Doncaster, where the newly elected mayor is an English Democrat), the last point is as important as the first.

Despite the fact that so far the public has shown very little enthusiasm for them, pressure to introduce more elected mayors continues, both through bodies such as the New Local Government Network[21] and the Institute for Public Policy Research[22], and politically. The Conservative Party has indicated that, if successful at the next general Election, it will wish to see elected mayors in major cities, and the Labour Party remains committed to extending the model. But the concentration of power in a single pair of hands has implications for representation, and a better understanding of the processes and dynamics involved is necessary if the lack of diversity in mayoral selections and elections to date is to be addressed.

<u>Recommendation 5</u>

There should be further and much more detailed research into how leaders achieve that role, what their backgrounds and portfolio-holding patterns are, and the process by which they arrive at leadership. This research should also examine the internal dynamics of leadership elections, and begin to identify the key influences on voting decisions. It should examine these issues in opposition groups as well as those in control, and should build upon and expand the small body of work available to date.

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[20] The Elected Mayor of Bedford died in August 2009, so that at the time of publication this is a vacancy.
[21] *Directly Elected, Direct Results,* Ed. Lucy Mott, NLGN, June 2008
[22] e.g Michael Lodge & Guy Kenny, *Mayors Rule,* published in Public Policy Research, April 2008

Recommendation 6

The need to identify and develop leadership potential should be addressed, in the case of backbench members, by the introduction of some form of 'parliamentary private secretary' system to give members the opportunity to shadow and support cabinet portfolio holders. If possible, such positions should be used as part of a developmental process for new councillors and those from under-represented groups[23].

Recommendation 7

The IDEA's Census of Local Councillors should be extended to include information about portfolio-holders, and this information should be related to age, ethnicity and disability as well as gender.

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[23] This recommendation was also made by the New Local Government Network in their Report *First Among Equals*, March 2009

Chief Executives

Although Chief Executives are not elected in the way that leaders, deputy leaders and mayors are, their composition does provide an interesting contrast with their political counterparts.

In July 2009 – the point at which this snapshot was taken – 21% of local authority Chief Executives were women. This is an increase of 1% on 2008 and 2% on 2007. However, because of a net reduction of 38 authorities, there was a net reduction in numerical terms of 6 women chief executives, returning to the 2007 level of 70.

There are three authorities – Brentwood, Haringey and South Northamptonshire – in which the Leader, Deputy Leader and Chief Executive are all women. In 2008 South Northamptonshire was the only one. There are 160 authorities in which all three posts are held by men.

There are nine authorities in which both the Leader and the Chief Executive are women, and 113 in which women hold one post or the other. This leaves 234 in which women hold neither, and of these 160 also have male Deputy Leaders.

During the last 12 months a number of authorities have decided to share Chief Executives. If this trend continues, the number of Chief Executive posts will diminish further, and the effect of this on gender balance remains to be seen.

Regional Leaders' Boards

The Local Democracy Economic Development and Construction Bill (currently going through the legislative process) provides for the establishment of Leaders Boards to replace Regional Assemblies. Together with the Regional Development Agencies and other strategic partners (who will have representation on the Boards) they will be responsible for regional strategic issues. A number of regions have already begun to set these Boards up, and although they are at present only shadow bodies, the effect of the lack of diversity on their composition is already visible.

Table 2: Women on new Regional Leaders' Boards[24]

Leaders Board	No. Local Authority Members	No. Local Authority Women Members
4 North West	15	0
East Midlands Regional Board	14	3
South West Councils Strategic Leaders Board	20	5
Yorkshire & the Humber Leaders' Board	8	0

In addition, the Leeds City Region Leaders Board is entirely male[25], although it does include the only BME leader known to be a member of one of the new Boards.

In general, Regional Assemblies, being composed of more than just Leaders, tended to include more women; for instance, in the North East there are no women Leaders, but of the 63 members of the Association of North East Councils 13 (21%) are women.

Recommendation 6

The Secretary of State should take the gender make-up of Leaders Boards into account when approving new regional arrangements, and should insist upon at least 30% of local authority representatives being women, thus reflecting the make-up of councils as a whole. S/he should also take other diversity issues into account where relevant.

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[24] Information from Regional Leaders' Boards own websites: www.4nw.org.uk, www.emra.gov.uk, www.swcouncils.gov.uk and www.lgyh.gov.uk
[25] www.leedscityregion.gov.uk

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Where two-tier systems are being replaced by new single-tier authorities, thought should be given as to how the percentage of women councillors can be either maintained or increased. New councils should not be allowed to have all-male cabinets/executives, and there should be monitoring by the relevant bodies of progress.

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<u>Sources & Acknowledgements</u>

The principal source of information about leaders, deputy leaders and chief executives in this report was local authority websites, supplemented by phone calls to individual authorities and, occasionally, local newspapers. This is the third year in which we have conducted this research, and it remains striking how difficult it is to access this rather basic information on some council websites, and how poorly briefed some local authority switchboard staff are - for instance, there is often confusion between the Leader of Council and the Chair, and in many cases the name of the deputy leader was unknown to anyone outside Democratic Services departments.

However, we would like to thank all the council staff, at whatever level, who patiently answered our questions.

We also used the websites of various regional bodies to ascertain the makeup of Leaders' Boards where they exist; the web addresses of these are listed as a footnote in the body of the text.

Other sources have also informed our report, and these are listed below.

Bochel, Catherine and Bochel, Hugh: *Women 'Leaders' in Local Government in the UK*, Parliamentary Affairs Vol. 61 No. 3, 2008

Centre for Women & Democracy: *Leadership & Gender in Local Government in England, Part 1* March 2007

Centre for Women & Democracy: *Leadership & Gender in Local Government in England, Part 2* July 2008

House of Commons Library: *Local Authority Leaders' Boards* SN/PC/05069

IDEA : *National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2008* January 2009

New Local Government Network: *First Among Equals*, March 2009

New Local Government Network, *Directly Elected, Direct Results,* Ed. Lucy Mott, June 2008

Michael Lodge & Guy Kenny, *Mayors Rule,* in Public Policy Research, April 2008

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