

Representative Democracy?

Women in the 2011 Local Government Elections in England

May 2011

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Introduction

In the space of a hundred years, the representation of women on the councils responsible for running the cities, towns and villages of England increased from 0% to 31%.

In recent years women's progress in local public life has stalled, and this year's results show no signs of improvement. At the present rate, it will be more than 150 years before there are equal numbers of men and women elected to English local councils. This year there was a net increase across over 3,000 seats of just 20 women – a depressing achievement given the amount of discussion and anguishing there has been recently over the role of women in politics

This is the fifth report produced by the Centre for Women & Democracy on women's success (or otherwise) in the local elections, and each year our investigation finds much the same picture. Women constitute about a third of candidates and a third of those elected. Women struggle to get their parties to select them in seats they can have a reasonable hope of winning, and many women councillors are in marginal seats vulnerable to national and local swings.

The under-representation of women is not merely a matter of justice, although it certainly is unjust that over half of the population should be taxed equally but represented unequally. Women (as well as minority groups) bring skills and experiences to the table which broaden and deepen the quality of decision-making, and they also bring an interest and expertise in a wider range of issues – research has shown, for instance, that the Westminster parliament

passed more legislation on issues such as domestic violence and childcare after the number of women MPs increased in 1997¹.

There is also an issue around legitimacy – it is surely reasonable to expect that in a representative democracy those elected should reflect those they claim to speak and legislate for. Women are not a minority group, and although there are many excellent male councillors and MPs, it is clearly wrong that they are not matched by the many excellent women who would be able to bring something different (not necessarily better) to political life.

Because at each election over 90% of councillors are elected are from either the Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat parties, much of the change needed to improve matters has to be effected inside member-based organisations which are almost entirely voluntary in nature, and in which there are often wide gaps between the aspirations of the national leadership and the ability to deliver on the ground. The report will look at each of the parties record on both candidates and councillors in some detail, but in general it is the case that, whatever the good intentions, much more could be done.

It seems axiomatic that electorates can only vote for people who actually appear on the ballot paper, yet in 2011 there were 318 wards – over 14% - in which none of the main three parties stood a female candidate. In other words, in

¹ Childs, S., Lovenduski, J. and Campbell, R. (2005) *Women at the Top 2005: Changing Numbers, Changing Politics?* London: Hansard Society.

wards where there were 3 seats up for election, all 9 of the candidates most likely to be elected were men. In contrast there were just 22 wards – out of 2,308 – in which all the candidates were women.

A report of this nature can draw attention to the problem and suggest some solutions, but improvement will only happen if everyone takes the problem seriously. At the moment, this is not the case. The electoral system does not allow for even the most basic monitoring; no-one has any real idea of the diversity of local government candidates, and the only way in which we are able to identify women is laborious and time-consuming. Yet if we do not know who is standing, how will we know what needs to be changed?

It's also true that it is difficult to find out how many women there are on each council – the only way at the moment seems to be to visit each website and count them. Clearly this is not satisfactory, and in Appendix A of this report we have listed 100 authorities and their percentage of women councillors. Later in the year we will produce a full list, but matters would be much simpler if this information was published by councils themselves and collated by one of the local government bodies.

Because of the impossibility of acquiring information about diversity, therefore, this report only covers women's representation; we recognise that there is a need to look at other areas, but sadly it is impossible to do so.

This is in the nature of an interim report; a fuller one will be produced later in the year. In the meantime, I would like to thank all those who have contributed or assisted with the production

of both the data and other information (including Sophie Olivant for her help with inputting).

The representation of women in local government is important, not only because local government is a route into other forms of political life, but because it is as close to local communities as government gets. It has a significant role to play, and can only play it to the full if it has both democratic legitimacy and access to the full range of all its citizens. 150 years is too long to wait for representative equality – we need to act now to set proper targets and find ways of meeting them.

Otherwise we will all be losing out.

Nan Sloane

Director,
Centre for Women & Democracy

May 2011

Executive Summary

At the present rate of progress, it will be more than 150 years before there are equal numbers of men and women elected to English local councils. Women's progress in local public life has stalled, and this year's results show no signs of improvement.

What Happened in 2011

This report looked at candidates and results in the local elections held on 5 May 2011 in 3,508 seats in 2,308 wards in 100 English local authorities. These seats were last contested in 2007.

As usual the collation of data was made difficult by the complete absence of any system for monitoring the diversity of either candidates or councillors elected.

Across the 100 authorities in the study there was a net increase of just 20 women councillors.

The Labour Party increased its number of women councillors by 152; the number of Liberal Democrat women fell by 111 and the number of Conservative women by 19².

30.7% of all councillors elected on 5 May 2011 were women. This represents a fall of 2.9% on the 2010 level, but an increase of 5.9% on 2009 and 0.7% on 2007.

30.4% of candidates in 2011 were women; in 2007 30.9% of candidates were female.

² The figure of a net increase of 20 is arrived at after adjusting the figures for the main parties to allow for small parties and independents.

33.3% of Liberal Democrat candidates were women, 31.7% of Labour and 29.1% of Conservative.

Despite predictions to the contrary, the electorate is still overwhelmingly more likely to elect candidates from one of the main three political parties (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat) than from smaller parties or independents. In 2011 92.5% of councillors elected were from one of the main three; in 2007 this figure was 92%. Thus the actions of these parties in terms of numbers of women candidates and their presence in 'winnable' seats is crucial if progress is to be made.

28.7% of Conservative councillors elected on 5 May were women, 32.5% of Labour, and 33.7% of Liberal Democrats.

Women were most likely to be elected in the North East (36.0%) and least likely to be successful in the East of England. They also did better in the large metropolitan authorities of the north and midlands (32.4%) than in the smaller two-tier districts (29.5%)³.

Although some authorities saw increases in the number of women councillors as a result of the election, 38 of the 100 in this study actually emerged with fewer women. Poole and Nottingham had the greatest increases (10% and 12% respectively) and Herefordshire the greatest decrease (12%).

One of the most straightforward ways of increasing the numbers of both women candidates and councillors is to use the

³ There were no elections in London in 2011

opportunity offered by vacancies caused when sitting councillors do not defend their seats for one reason or another (usually retirement, deselection or death).

In 2011 78.2% of sitting (incumbent) councillors representing the Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat parties defended their seats. The vast majority of these were re-elected.

700 incumbents did not defend their seats and were replaced by their parties with new candidates. 21.7% of male councillors for these parties did not seek re-election and only 19.9% of female. This represents a reversal of previous trends, and it remains to be seen whether or not this change is the start of a trend or just a blip.

The net gain in women councillors in these seats across the country was just 26.

The other main route for change is the loss or gain of a seat by one party from another. A total of 533 seats changed hands in this way; in 100 of them women challengers defeated women incumbents, thus making no difference whatsoever to the overall number of women councillors.

In the remaining seats there was a net loss across all three parties of 9 women councillors.

Adjusting these figures to take account of advances by the Green Party and some changes in numbers for minor parties and independents, the overall outcome is a net gain of 20 women councillors in England in 2011.

Recommendations

1. Monitoring of Nominations

In order to enable everyone concerned to develop a much better understanding of the issues, a monitoring form similar to that used in many other areas (including recruitment for public appointments and applications for funding) should be completed and submitted by candidates together with nomination forms. At present, nomination papers ask for no information other than name, polling number, description (i.e., party) and address. Monitoring information would not be published, and could easily be entered into a database by each authority's elections officer and forwarded to an appropriate body (probably the Electoral Commission) for collation and eventual publication. CFWD will be approaching the relevant organisations to discuss how to progress this matter.

2. Council Diversity Figures

Each local authority should be required, on an annual basis after each set of elections, to publish diversity figures for its council on its website. These figures should as a minimum include gender, ethnicity, age, and disability and may include others such as sexual orientation as well. Local authorities should also be asked to forward diversity figures to the Local Government Association, which should include them in its Improvement & Development A-Z of Councils⁴. Again, CFWD will be approaching the relevant organisations to discuss how to progress this matter.

⁴ <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/org/la-data.do>

3. Democracy Diversity Fund

We recognise that the primary function of all political parties is to fight and win elections, and that, although they are almost all committed to diversity in theory, it is often difficult for them to find resources for training and developing thousands of local government candidates. In our submission in 2009 to the Speaker's Conference we recommended the establishment of a Democracy Diversity Fund to support parties in finding, training and selecting good candidates of both genders from all communities. Parties would have to apply to the fund with a planned programme and also be able to offer matching funding in cash or kind. The scheme would need to be monitored in terms of outcomes, and support would be withdrawn from parties not meeting targets or able to demonstrate significant improvement. Funding would be ring-fenced to the project, and the system could be subject to review after each election.

4. The Conservative Party

The Conservative Party is committed in theory to improving the representation of women, and made some headway at the 2010 General Election in terms of MPs, but has made virtually no improvement in the representation of women in local government. We recognise that positive action is not part of the Party's culture or tradition⁵ but we also believe that unless some action is taken the Conservatives will continue to fall further behind its rivals in terms of women's representation. We will therefore be seeking meetings with relevant bodies within the Party to discuss how this could best be achieved.

⁵ Although we also note that David Cameron threatened some Conservative Associations with all-women shortlists before the General Election.

5. The Labour Party

The Labour Party has practiced positive action for local government selections since 2004, and as a result has significantly improved its performance in terms of both women candidates and councillors elected. However, its record prior to 2004 was very poor, and the actions it has taken since then have not yet brought it to the point at which it either leads in local government at the level that it does at Westminster, or does as well as it possibly thinks it does locally. It is also recognised that there is constant pressure from some parts of the Party to abandon or modify positive action measures (as happened to some extent in the recent devolved elections) and that this is matched by pressure from some minority groups to introduce it. We note that the Party has committed to retain positive action for Westminster selections, and would wish to see a similar commitment made for local government. In addition, although we note that, without Labour's action since 2004 the total percentage of women councillors would actually be in reverse, we believe that the Party should review its candidate recruitment policies to ensure that they are maximising opportunities to attract women candidates. We shall be seeking meetings with relevant people to discuss how these issues might best be addressed.

6. The Liberal Democrat Party

The Liberal Democrat Party does well in terms of women candidates, often out-performing Labour. A marginally greater proportion of its councillors elected are also women, but overall the fact that it holds a large number of marginal seats means that at any one election there can be substantial variations in terms of numbers. As a result the Liberal Democrats have difficulty in impacting on the overall situation, and may, in

years like 2011, actually put the brake on what might otherwise have been progress. The Liberal Democrats continue to be opposed to positive action in the form of quotas, but have recently adopted new mechanisms for improving the numbers of women parliamentary candidates. CFWD believes that a similar initiative is needed at local level to support and develop the Party's good record in terms of candidates, and will be seeking meetings with relevant bodies to discuss this.

7. Reviewing the Culture

Although the percentage of women councillors retiring was lower than that for men in 2011 this was against the general trend. Efforts to recruit women candidates and councillors are easily under-mined by high drop-out rates, and more work needs to be done to identify the causes of retirements, particularly those which take place after one term. Accordingly we recommend that both local authorities and political parties consider, in consultation with women councillors, what factors affect retirement rates and what can be done to improve them.

Sources

Information on candidates and election results has been collated from information supplied by the local authorities concerned, almost entirely through their websites. These are of very variable quality, with some making electoral information or details about councillors very easy to find and use, and others being nearly impenetrable even to those experienced in using them. However, it should also be said that a number of authorities have greatly improved their websites recently, and for this we are duly grateful.

Other sources used are our own studies of previous elections and the excellent annual digests of local elections results produced by the LGC Elections Centre at the University of Plymouth.

Publications either used for background or referred to in the text are:

- The Local Government Ideas and Development Census of Councillors 2008, which contains a considerable amount of information about local councillors and is available from their website at <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=9308387>
- The Councillors' Commission Report *Representing the Future* published in December 2007, which deals with obstacles to and strategies for the improvement of diversity in local government, and which is also available online at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/583990.pdf>
- The Equalities and Human Rights Commission's 2010 report on *Pathways to Politics* (produced together with de Montfort and Manchester Universities) which deals mainly with national political office, but also has some interesting findings which are relevant at all levels. http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/pathways_to_politics.pdf
- Sarah Childs, Joni Lovenduski and Rosie Campbell, *Women at the Top 2005: Changing Numbers, Changing Politics?* London: Hansard Society, 2005

Terms of Reference and Definitions

The sheer scale of local elections in England in 2011 made it impossible to analyse them all in time for an early report. For this interim publication, therefore, we have looked at a representative sample of 100 of the 279 authorities involved, and will produce data on all of them later in the year.

A full list of the 100 authorities involved in the study is in Appendix A (together with details of their increase/decrease in women councillors).

The principal areas we were interested in were:

- Women candidates
- Women councillors elected
- How women did in regions, and by type of authority and type of election
- How the political parties did, and, in particular, to what extent they used opportunities for change successfully

CFWD has been producing reports on English local elections since 2007, and since that time patterns have clearly established themselves. This is despite the fact that the political fortunes of each party affect the outcomes in terms of gender as well as seats won or lost.

This report deals predominantly with the main three political parties – Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat. However, it does also look at the basic position for both the smaller parties (Green, UKIP, etc) and independent candidates, as well as for a clutch of parties which are so small that they field fewer than 100 candidates.

The Green Party, UKIP and the BNP all fielded in excess of 100 candidates, and are therefore included separately beside the main three.

All other candidates have been classified as either Independent or Other; these two categories are defined as follows:

Independent: For the purposes of this study, this heading includes all candidates identifying themselves as ‘independent’, plus localised groups of candidates standing as a party within a single authority, e.g. the Barnsley Independents, Integrity, the Pirate Party, Halton Local Independent Party, etc.. These are not listed separately in the appendices.

Other: Very small parties standing fewer than 100 candidates in more than one authority, or, in one or two cases, parties which have a national existence but which fielded candidates in only one authority, are defined as ‘Other’ for the purposes of this study. These parties, together with the numbers of candidates and women candidates they fielded, are listed in Appendix B.

As always, this does not pretend to be an academic study, but it does offer some understanding of women’s performance in local elections in an accessible way, and hopefully provides a starting point for other work.

Elections 2011

30.7% of councillors elected in England on 5 May 2011 were women. This represents a fall of 2.9% on the 2010 level, but an increase of 5.9% on 2009 and 0.7% on the last time these specific seats were contested in 2007.

This study looks at results in 100 authorities across England; these are listed in Appendix A.

As Chart 1 shows, the election of women councillors has fallen into a depressingly predictable pattern, with low points in 2005 when there were very few elections (mainly in county authorities) and 2009 (also county authorities plus a number of new super-unitaries), and the 'high' point in 2010 being caused almost entirely by the unusually high number of women elected in the borough council elections in London, where a concerted effort had been made to recruit more female and BME candidates. Once these highs and lows are allowed for, it can be seen that the underlying increase is both small and slow, with, if the figures are averaged out over the period, only 29.5% of councillors elected each year being female.

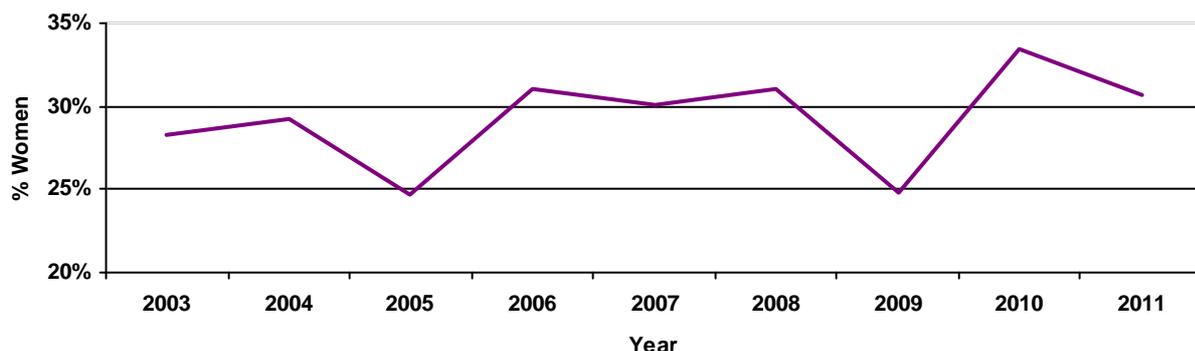
Thus the progress of women's representation in local government has stalled, and shows no sign of improving.

That said, there are some distinct variations in how different political parties, regions, and types of authority perform.

Political Parties

Despite predictions to the contrary, the electorate is still overwhelmingly more likely to elect candidates from one of the main three political parties (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat) than from smaller parties or those who stand as independents. In 2011 92.5% of councillors elected were from one of the main three, and although smaller parties and independents did well in a small number of specific areas (e.g. the Greens in Brighton or the Independents in Boston), this was very definitely still the exception rather than the rule. In 2010, 98% of councillors elected were from the big three (most elections that year were in London or urban metropolitan authorities, where generally speaking Independents are less likely to stand and more likely to do badly), 93% in 2009, and 92% in 2008 and 2007.

**Chart 1: Women elected as a percentage of all councillors elected
2003-2011**



As a consequence, the success (or otherwise) of political parties in getting women elected is important. 28.8% of Conservative councillors elected were women, 32.4% of Labour and 33.8% of Liberal Democrats. Chart 2 below shows their record over the last 5 years.

The party which did best overall in terms of women elected was the Green Party, 40.4% of whose successful candidates were women. However, across the country fewer than 100 Green councillors were elected, thus making their impact on the overall figure negligible.

212 Independent councillors were elected, of whom 26.4% were women. UKIP and the BNP got one councillor apiece elected (male in the case of UKIP, female for the BNP), and the very small parties (English Democrats, various Socialists, etc) had just 7 councillors elected between them, of whom 2 were women.

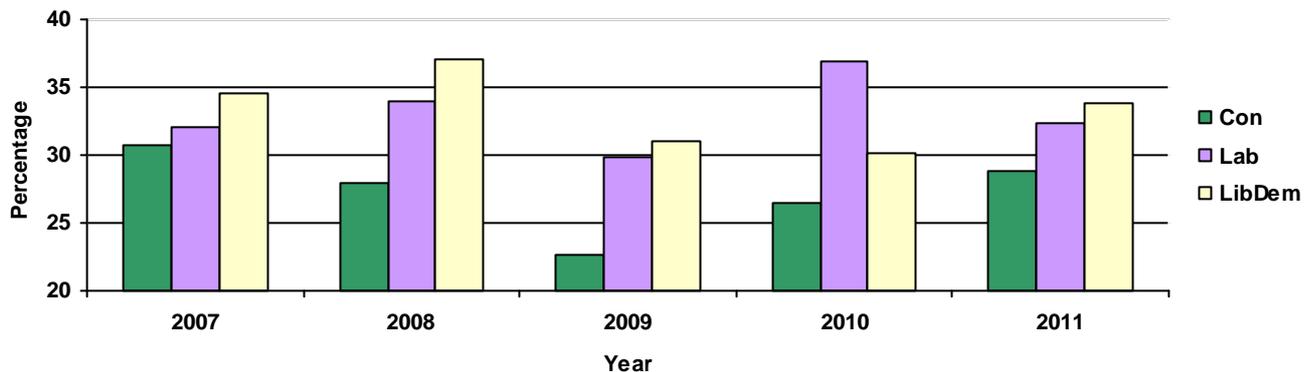
Regional Differences

In 4 of the 8 regions with elections in 2011, there was a slight fall in women as a percentage of councillors elected. In only one – the East Midlands – was there an increase of any significance, although it remains one of the regions with the lowest representation of women.

These differences are partly accounted for by the fact that, on average, women are more likely to be elected in large urban authorities such as the metropolitan districts in the north of England, but demographic factors also play a part as does the political character of the different areas.

Table 1 on page 15 shows women as a percentage of councillors elected in 2011 compared with the same figure for the year in which the same seats were last contested (2007).

Chart 2: Women as a percentage of councillors elected by political party 2007-2011



Type of Authority

There were 3 types of authority with elections in 2011 – shire districts, unitaries and metropolitan districts.

Women were marginally more likely to be elected in the large metropolitan authorities, i.e., those authorities with large numbers of Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors. In the shire districts, where the Conservative Party holds significant numbers of seats, women are less successful.

Table 2 on page 15 shows the position in 2011 for each type of authority and compares it with that in 2007.

Type of Election

One third of all seats in metropolitan districts come up for election every four years, but both the shire districts and the unitaries have a mix of elections by thirds and elections in which the whole council comes up for elections every four years.

A total of 123 authorities had a third of their council seats up for election in 2011, and 156 authorities had whole council elections.

On the whole, women tend to do slightly better in elections by thirds, but the difference is marginal, with whole council elections accounting for almost all of the 0.7% increase.

Table 3 on page 15 shows the 2011 position compared with that in 2007.

Make-Up of Councils

According to Local Government Ideas and Development's biennial Census of Councillors⁶, 30.8% of councillors are women. This percentage has remained much the same for a number of years, but within it there are considerable variations between council and council.

We looked at the increase/decrease in women councillors in the 100 authorities in our study. The pattern ranged from increases of 10% and 11% (Poole and Nottingham respectively), to a fall of 12% in Herefordshire. In 16 authorities there was no change at all, and there was a decrease in the number of women councillors in a total of 38 authorities.

Across these 100 councils, there was a net increase in 2011 of 20 women.

Thus, if the current rate of progress were maintained, it will take over 150 years for women to be equally represented in local government – longer than Parliament or any other democratic institution in the UK.

We also looked at the longer term changes in a specific group of authorities. In the last 25 years (1986 to 2011), there was an 11% increase in women on these authorities, but within that there was considerable variation, with the best performing authorities (Tameside, Barnsley, and Wakefield) having increases of 28%, as against South Tyneside, Newcastle upon Tyne and Wolverhampton, where there were decreases of between 2% and 5%, and, most shockingly,

⁶ 2008 edition. The 2010 edition has not been published at the time of writing, but given recent local election results it is unlikely that there has been much change.

Oldham, where the representation of women has decreased by 20% since 1986.

A detailed list of the 100 authorities referred to above, is in Appendix A, and of the 36 metropolitan councils in Appendix C. CFWD will be publishing a complete list of English local authorities and the number of women on them in the full report later this year. It should be noted that this information does not seem to be available anywhere else – or at least not in an easily accessible form – and this and other gaps in monitoring are dealt with in the Recommendations section at the end of this report.

Candidates

Women cannot be elected if they are not on the ballot paper. In 2011 30.4% of candidates were women; not surprisingly, the line in Chart 3 below shows much the same pattern of peaks and troughs as Chart 1, and much the same lack of progress.

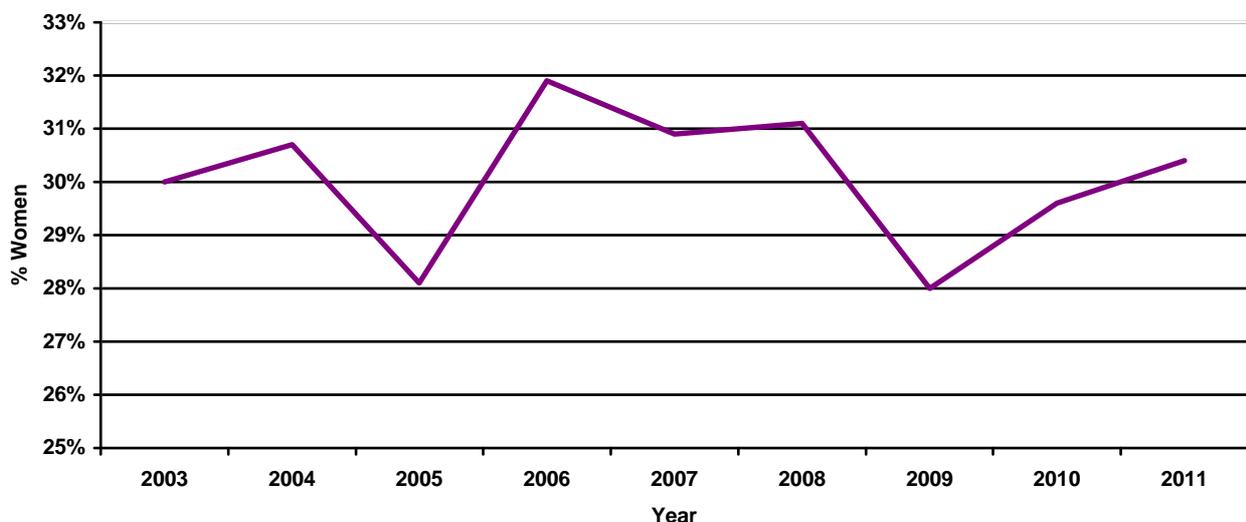
parties, their choice of candidate can (or could) make a real difference.

Table 4 on page 15 shows the percentage of women candidates for all the parties which fielded more than 100, as well as the percentage of women standing for a collection of other parties (listed in Appendix B) or as independents.

Women were most likely to be found as candidates in shire districts (31.2%), with 29.9% of candidates being women in metropolitan and unitary authorities. These percentages have varied very little over the years.

Women are slightly more likely to stand for election in authorities for which whole council elections are held every four years – 31.9% of candidates in these authorities were women in 2011 as against 29.2% in authorities with elections by thirds. This is a fairly stable pattern,

**Chart 3: Women as a percentage of all candidates
2003-2011**



Given that over 90% of councillors elected are consistently from one of the main three political

Table 1: Women as a percentage of all councillors elected by region.

Region	% Women 2011	% Women 2007	% change
East of England	26.5%	25.9%	0.6%
East Midlands	28.8%	24.2%	4.6%
North East	36.0%	36.2%	- 0.2%
North West	33.3%	34.3%	- 1.0%
South East	31.5%	31.8%	- 0.3%
South West	30.3%	29.9%	0.4%
West Midlands	27.6%	28.0%	- 0.4%
Yorkshire & Humber	31.9%	31.3%	0.6%
All	30.7%	30.1%	0.6%

Table 2: Women as a percentage of all councillors elected in 2011 and 2007 by authority type

Type	No. Authorities	% Women 2011	% Women 2007	% change
Metropolitan Districts	36	32.4%	31.7%	0.7%
Shire Districts	194	29.5%	28.4%	1.1%
Unitaries	49	31.2%	31.5%	-0.3%
All	279	30.7%	30.1%	0.6%

Table3: Women as a percentage of all councillors elected in 2011 and 2007 by election type

Type	No. Authorities	% Women 2011	% Women 2007	% change
Thirds	123	31.6%	31.6%	0.0%
Whole Council	156	30.3%	29.6%	0.7%
All		30.7%	30.0%	0.7%

Table 4: Women as a percentage of candidates fielded by each party in 2011

Party	% Women 2011	% Women 2010	% Women 2009
Conservative	29.1%	30.2%	24.6%
Labour	31.7%	34.2%	31.3%
Liberal Democrat	33.3%	30.8%	30.5%
Green	37.7%	35.5%	39.5%
BNP	24.1%	22.2%	21.8%
UKIP	25.1%	21.2%	23.6%
Independent	25.3%	13.6%	18.1%
Other	21.2%	30.0%	22.2%

partly because, where there are whole-council elections, those parties which actively seek to recruit women candidates have more time in which to do so, and partly because local party members are more likely to choose one woman as part of a team of two or three candidates than as the sole candidate.

However, the difference between the two types is fairly marginal, and changes to the type of election held would be unlikely to have a major effect of the numbers of women candidates.

Achieving Change

Given that, each year, over 90% of councillors elected belong to either the Conservative, Labour, or Liberal Democrat Party, it is clear that the actions of those parties are key to increasing the numbers of women councillors. But they can only do this if they take the opportunities offered year on year, and the fact is that – assuming that parties are not going arbitrarily to remove sitting male councillors in order to replace them with women - these opportunities occur relatively infrequently.

We looked in some depth at the pattern of candidacy, and in particular considered incumbency, retirements, the recruitment of new candidates and marginality.

Incumbency & Retirement

60% of councillors selected in May 2011 were incumbents – that is, they were sitting councillors defending their seats. In 2007, when these seats were last fought, the figure was 61%.

One of the most straightforward ways of increasing the numbers of both women candidates and councillors is to use the opportunity offered by vacancies caused when sitting councillors do not stand again for one reason or another (usually retirement, deselection or death).

In every election, the vast majority of incumbents defend their seats; in 2011 75.8% did so. This figure is very variable from year to year – in 2009 82.8% of incumbents stood again and in 2010 70.1%, but has never fallen below the 70% mark.

This means that in 2011 there were vacancies for new candidates in 24.2% of seats.

700 Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors retired; of these, 493 (70%) were men, thus offering – in theory at least – a real opportunity for there to be significant numbers of new women candidates in seats they had a good prospect of winning.

One change in the usual pattern was to the relative percentages of men and women councillors retiring; as a general rule, a greater percentage of women councillors retires at each election than men, but this year the pattern was reversed, with 21.7% of male councillors not seeking re-election and only 19.9% of female. Whether this is an exception or not remains to be seen, but any slowing of the retirement rates of women councillors is welcome, and would warrant further investigation to determine the reasons for it.

Replacement Candidates

If all women councillors who stood down were replaced by new women candidates, and if the majority of men who stood down were also replaced by women, progress would be quite rapid. Sadly, however, this is not what happens.

Table 5 shows how each party did in numerical terms in increasing the number of women candidates in seats it held, and could therefore reasonably expect to win.

Table 5: Women retirements and replacement candidates by political party

Party	Cllrs not seeking re-election	Women Cllrs not seeking re-election	Women replacement candidates
Con	390	105	105
Lab	173	61	82
LD	137	48	53
All	700	214	240

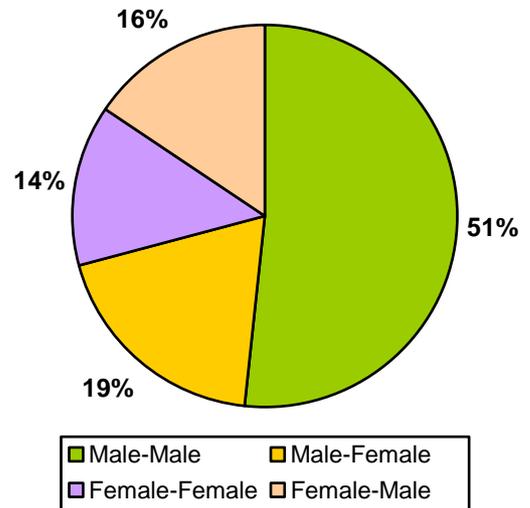
This pattern follows that of previous years, and the consistent failure of two out of the three main parties to ensure that a significant proportion of retiring councillors are replaced by new women candidates is one of the main causes of the slow progress towards parity.

This is particularly the case since, although parties are generally more likely to retain seats they are defending than they are to lose them, they are also more likely to lose them where they have new candidates, particularly in years when large numbers of seats change hands.

As Chart 3 shows, male replacement candidates replaced male retirees in 51% of the 700 seats we looked at; women replaced women in only 14%. And although women were this year

slightly more likely to replace men than men to replace women, the difference was marginal.

Chart 3: Gender of retiring and replacement candidates



In the event, 448 of the 700 new candidates we looked at were elected, including 176 of the new women candidates; in other words 64 replacement women candidates lost. Of the candidates from different parties who replaced them, 62 were women.

Thus, despite all the opportunities offered to parties by retirements, the net gain of women councillors by this route was just 26, and the bulk of even this gain was wiped out by marginal seats changing hands.

Marginality

In all parties, and at all levels of election, women are more likely to find themselves selected to fight marginal seats than any other.

This is one reason for the very high turnover of women councillors.

In 38.5% of seats won by one party from another where the incumbent candidate stood there was a change of gender. In 56.7% of these, women councillors were defeated by male challengers – in numerical terms this means that 107 women councillors lost their seats to men and 98 men lost to women – a net loss in these seats of 9 women.

Deducting these from the 26 gained in the 'Replacement Candidates' section and adjusting for changes in the numbers of women elected for smaller parties or as independents, we arrive at the result of a net gain of women councillors in England in 2011 of 20.

The Conservative Party

In the 100 local authorities covered in this study, the Conservative Party had a net loss of 19 women councillors.

Overall, the Conservatives lag behind the Liberal Democrats and Labour in terms of both candidates and councillors. Since they are such major players in terms of council seats – this year they won almost as many seats as Labour and the Liberal Democrats put together – their poor performance has a real impact, and this year's net loss, combined with a much larger loss of Liberal Democrat women, contributed to the elimination of most of what would otherwise have been a net gain in across the country.

This is particularly disappointing since not only is this pattern not consistent (in 2008, for instance, the party had a net gain of women councillors) but in 2011 the Conservatives had a

net gain in terms of seats overall. The lack of consistency in getting women elected (and therefore of contributing to any wider advance in any sustainable way) is at least in part due to the party having no effective mechanism for delivering its national aspirations for women's representation at local level.

The Labour Party

Labour had a net gain of 152 women councillors in the 100 councils in this study.

Labour has used positive action in local government elections since 2004; prior to this point less than 28% of Labour candidates were women, and the majority of those were fielded in marginal or unwinnable seats. Labour now requires that 50% of candidates in winnable seats should be women, and this has had a noticeable effect on the levels of both women candidates and councillors elected. However, the fact that incumbents are very likely to stand again means that opportunities in 'safe' seats are few, and councillors in marginal seats are always vulnerable to what, in recent years, have sometimes been sizeable swings in local government elections.

Labour was a net gainer in the 2011 local elections, and many women in marginal seats were elected as well as a good number of 'replacements'. However, this leaves a substantial proportion of Labour women vulnerable in bad years, and makes Labour's progress less sustainable than it might at first appear.

In addition, local parties often report problems in identifying suitable women candidates, and this an issue which Labour needs to address if it

is to keep up its momentum. It also needs to ensure that its commitment to positive action continues to be practical as well as principled; recent developments in devolved elections have not been encouraging as some aspects of such action seem to have been abandoned recently.

The Liberal Democrat Party

The Liberal Democrat Party suffered a net loss of 111 women councillors in the 100 councils in this study.

The Liberal Democrats consistently do well in local elections in terms of both women candidates and women elected; this is in sharp contrast to their performance in national elections. However, the fact that the Party tends to win fewer seats overall – even in good years – means that the impact on the overall level of women councillors is low. This is compounded by the fact that they do significantly less well than Labour (though better than the Conservatives) in terms of new women candidates in seats with retirements. This, combined with the concentration of women in marginal seats and the very high level of Liberal Democrat losses generally, resulted in the large reduction in the number of women elected, and was the major contributor to wiping out the gains made by Labour.

The Liberal Democrat Party has a good record generally of finding and encouraging women candidates, and this needs to be maintained.

Conclusions and Recommendations

At present, 31% of councillors in England are women. The current rate of progress is negligible, and if it is maintained it will be more than 150 years before women have an equal voice in local government.

Given that over 92% of councillors elected belong to either the Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat parties, the actions of these three in promoting women candidates in winnable seats is crucial; however well smaller parties such as the Greens do they will not be sufficient to make a difference in the foreseeable future. As a consequence it is crucial that there be supportive (if not uncritical) dialogue between the parties and relevant bodies, including women's organisations, to identify and implement ways of moving forwards.

In recent years there have been a number of inquiries into why women, in particular, seem less likely to stand for public office. These include the Councillors' Commission report of 2007, the Speaker's Conference Report (2010) and the Equality and Human Right Commission's report on Pathways to Politics (2010). In all cases, there was an understanding that, although there are many factors at play, and although some of them are well outside the scope of political parties to solve, they hold the key to improving women's representation.

Accordingly, whilst it is recognised that smaller parties have a role, the majority of recommendations below relate to the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties.

As has been observed in every elections report produced by the Centre for Women & Democracy, there is currently no mechanism for monitoring the diversity of either candidates or councillors elected each year, nor is there an easily available way of finding out what percentage of members of each council are women, and no way of mapping or monitoring progress that is not both laborious and long-winded. A couple of recommendations therefore also refer to these issues.

Recommendations

1. Monitoring of Nominations

In order to enable everyone concerned to develop a much better understanding of the issues, a monitoring form similar to that used in many other areas (including recruitment for public appointments and applications for funding) should be completed and submitted by candidates together with nomination forms. At present, nomination papers ask for no information other than name, polling number, description (i.e., party) and address. Monitoring information would not be published, and could easily be entered into a database by each authority's elections officer and forwarded to an appropriate body (probably the Electoral Commission) for collation and eventual publication. CFWD will be approaching the relevant organisations to discuss how to progress this matter.

2. Council Diversity Figures

Each local authority should be required, on an annual basis after each set of elections, to publish diversity figures for its council on its website. These figures should as a minimum include gender, ethnicity, age, and disability and

may include others such as sexual orientation as well. Local authorities should also be asked to forward diversity figures to the Local Government Association, which should include them in its Improvement & Development A-Z of Councils⁷. Again, CFWD will be approaching the relevant organisations to discuss how to progress this matter.

3. Democracy Diversity Fund

We recognise that the primary function of all political parties is to fight and win elections, and that, although they are almost all committed to diversity in theory, it is often difficult for them to find resources for training and developing thousands of local government candidates. In our submission in 2009 to the Speaker's Conference we recommended the establishment of a Democracy Diversity Fund to support parties in finding, training and selecting good candidates of both genders from all communities. Parties would have to apply to the fund with a planned programme and also be able to offer matching funding in cash or kind. The scheme would need to be monitored in terms of outcomes, and support would be withdrawn from parties not meeting targets or able to demonstrate significant improvement. Funding would be ring-fenced to the project, and the system could be subject to review after each election.

4. The Conservative Party

The Conservative Party is committed in theory to improving the representation of women, and made some headway at the 2010 General Election in terms of MPs, but has made virtually no improvement in the representation of women in local government. We recognise that

⁷ <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/org/la-data.do>

positive action is not part of the Party's culture or tradition⁸ but we also believe that unless some action is taken the Conservatives will continue to fall further behind its rivals in terms of women's representation. We will therefore be seeking meetings with relevant bodies within the Party to discuss how this could best be achieved.

5. The Labour Party

The Labour Party has practiced positive action for local government selections since 2004, and as a result has significantly improved its performance in terms of both women candidates and councillors elected. However, its record prior to 2004 was very poor, and the actions it has taken since then have not yet brought it to the point at which it either leads in local government at the level that it does at Westminster, or does as well as it possibly thinks it does locally. It is also recognised that there is constant pressure from some parts of the Party to abandon or modify positive action measures (as happened to some extent in the recent devolved elections) and that this is matched by pressure from some minority groups to introduce it. We note that the Party has committed to retain positive action for Westminster selections, and would wish to see a similar commitment made for local government. In addition, although we note that, without Labour's action since 2004 the total percentage of women councillors would actually be in reverse, we believe that the Party should review its candidate recruitment policies to ensure that they are maximising opportunities to attract women candidates. We shall be

⁸ Although we also note that David Cameron threatened some Conservative Associations with all-women shortlists before the General Election.

seeking meetings with relevant people to discuss how these issues might best be addressed.

6. The Liberal Democrat Party

The Liberal Democrat Party does well in terms of women candidates, often out-performing Labour. A marginally greater proportion of its councillors elected are also women, but overall the fact that it holds a large number of marginal seats means that at any one election there can be substantial variations in terms of numbers. As a result the Liberal Democrats have difficulty in impacting on the overall situation, and may, in years like 2011, actually put the brake on what might otherwise have been progress. The Liberal Democrats continue to be opposed to positive action in the form of quotas, but have recently adopted new mechanisms for improving the numbers of women parliamentary candidates. CFWD believes that a similar initiative is needed at local level to support and develop the Party's good record in terms of candidates, and will be seeking meetings with relevant bodies to discuss this.

7. Reviewing the Culture

Although the percentage of women councillors retiring was lower than that for men in 2011 this was against the general trend. Efforts to recruit women candidates and councillors are easily under-mined by high drop-out rates, and more work needs to be done to identify the causes of retirements, particularly those which take place after one term. Accordingly we recommend that both local authorities and political parties consider, in consultation with women councillors, what factors affect retirement rates and what can be done to improve them.

Appendix A

100 local authorities included in this study, together with the percentage increase/decrease in women councillors in 2011.

There were three types of authority with elections; metropolitan districts (met), two-tier shire districts (sd) and unitaries (u).

Authority	Type	Total Councillors	2007 Women%	2011 Women%	% +/-
Ashford	sd	43	26%	21%	-5%
Barnsley	met	63	30%	32%	2%
Bath & North East Somerset	u	65	20%	23%	3%
Birmingham	met	120	34%	33%	-2%
Blackburn with Darwen	u	64	20%	19%	-2%
Blackpool	u	42	29%	31%	2%
Bolton	met	60	28%	27%	-2%
Boston	sd	32	22%	22%	0%
Bournemouth	u	54	31%	30%	-2%
Bracknell Forest	u	42	31%	31%	0%
Bradford	met	90	27%	32%	6%
Braintree	sd	60	30%	37%	7%
Brighton & Hove	u	54	44%	44%	0%
Bristol	u	72	29%	25%	-4%
Bury	met	51	33%	29%	-4%
Calderdale	met	51	33%	27%	-6%
Chelmsford	sd	57	25%	28%	4%
Chesterfield	sd	48	33%	29%	-4%
Christchurch	sd	24	33%	42%	8%
Coventry	met	54	26%	30%	4%
Darlington	u	53	32%	30%	-2%
Derby	u	49	24%	27%	2%
Doncaster	met	63	41%	43%	2%
Dover	sd	45	27%	31%	4%
Dudley	met	72	36%	38%	1%
East Cambridgeshire	sd	39	28%	26%	-3%
East Lindsey	sd	60	23%	27%	3%
East Riding of Yorkshire	u	67	46%	43%	-3%
Fenland	sd	40	15%	13%	-3%
Forest of Dean	sd	48	31%	29%	-2%
Fylde	sd	51	37%	37%	0%
Gateshead	met	66	33%	35%	2%
Gedling	sd	50	26%	34%	8%
Gravesham	sd	44	30%	30%	0%
Halton	u	55	24%	25%	2%

Authority	Type	Total Councillors	2007 Women%	2011 Women%	% +/-
Hambleton	sd	44	16%	18%	2%
Hartlepool	u	47	38%	40%	2%
Herefordshire	u	58	34%	22%	-12%
Kettering	sd	36	31%	36%	6%
King's Lynn & West Norfolk	sd	62	21%	18%	-3%
Kingston upon Hull	u	59	41%	34%	-7%
Kirklees	met	69	35%	36%	1%
Knowsley	met	63	33%	27%	-6%
Lancaster	sd	60	40%	43%	3%
Leeds	met	99	30%	31%	1%
Leicester	u	53	21%	30%	9%
Lewes	sd	41	27%	29%	2%
Lichfield	sd	56	30%	29%	-2%
Liverpool	met	90	40%	40%	0%
Luton	u	48	29%	31%	2%
Manchester	met	96	30%	29%	-1%
Medway	u	55	27%	25%	-2%
Middlesbrough	u	48	31%	29%	-2%
Milton Keynes	u	51	29%	27%	-2%
Newcastle upon Tyne	met	78	31%	28%	-3%
North East Lincolnshire	u	42	26%	29%	2%
North Lincolnshire	u	43	23%	23%	0%
North Somerset	u	61	33%	26%	-7%
North Tyneside	met	60	42%	43%	2%
North West Leicestershire	sd	38	18%	21%	3%
Nottingham	u	55	24%	35%	11%
Oldham	met	60	23%	18%	-5%
Peterborough	u	57	33%	30%	-4%
Plymouth	u	55	33%	35%	2%
Poole	u	42	31%	40%	10%
Portsmouth	u	42	29%	29%	0%
Reading	u	46	30%	37%	7%
Redcar & Cleveland	u	59	51%	44%	-7%
Ribble Valley	sd	39	31%	33%	3%
Rochdale	met	60	40%	42%	2%
Rotherham	met	63	29%	33%	5%
Rutland	u	26	19%	19%	0%
Salford	met	60	30%	28%	-2%
Sandwell	met	72	36%	36%	0%
Sefton	met	66	20%	23%	3%
Sevenoaks	sd	54	30%	33%	4%
Sheffield	met	84	35%	33%	-1%
Solihull	met	51	16%	18%	2%

Authority	Type	Total Councillors	2007 Women%	2011 Women%	% +/-
South Derbyshire	sd	36	28%	22%	-6%
South Northamptonshire	sd	42	33%	33%	0%
South Somerset	sd	60	28%	27%	-2%
South Tyneside	met	54	30%	33%	4%
St Helens	met	48	38%	35%	-2%
Stafford	sd	59	20%	22%	2%
Stockport	met	63	35%	29%	-6%
Suffolk Coastal	sd	55	29%	31%	2%
Sunderland	met	75	29%	31%	1%
Tameside	met	57	32%	33%	2%
Tewkesbury	sd	38	29%	32%	3%
Trafford	met	63	32%	35%	3%
Vale of White Horse	met	51	43%	43%	0%
Wakefield	met	63	40%	37%	-3%
Walsall	met	60	27%	30%	3%
West Dorset	sd	48	35%	35%	0%
Wigan	met	75	25%	24%	-1%
Winchester	sd	57	37%	33%	-4%
Wirral	met	66	30%	27%	-3%
Wolverhampton	met	60	28%	28%	0%
Wycombe	sd	44	32%	32%	0%
Wyre Forest	sd	42	19%	19%	0%

Appendix B

Parties included in the definition 'Other', together with the number and gender of candidates fielded.

Party	Total Candidates	Women	% Women
Alliance for Green Socialism	5	0	0.0%
Communist Party	1	0	0.0%
England First	2	0	0.0%
English Democrats	87	13	14.9%
Liberal Party	47	17	36.2%
National Front	11	0	0.0%
Respect	9	4	44.4%
Social Democratic Party	5	3	60.0%
Socialist Alternative	17	5	29.4%
Socialist Equality	2	0	0.0%
Socialist Labour Party	8	3	37.5%
Trade Unionists & Socialists Against Cuts	72	14	19.4%

Appendix C

Progress made in terms of women's representation by the 36 metropolitan districts between 1986 and 2011, i.e., over the last 25 years.

Authority	1986	2011	Difference
Barnsley	4%	32%	28%
Birmingham	31%	33%	2%
Bolton	25%	27%	2%
Bradford	23%	32%	9%
Bury	6%	29%	23%
Calderdale	21%	27%	6%
Coventry	10%	30%	20%
Doncaster	35%	43%	8%
Dudley	12%	38%	26%
Gateshead	22%	35%	13%
Kirklees	32%	36%	4%
Knowsley	12%	27%	15%
Leeds	26%	31%	5%
Liverpool	32%	40%	8%
Manchester	15%	29%	14%
Newcastle upon Tyne	30%	28%	-2%
North Tyneside	40%	43%	3%
Oldham	38%	18%	-20%
Rochdale	18%	42%	24%
Rotherham	13%	33%	20%
Salford	9%	28%	19%
Sandwell	25%	36%	11%
Sefton	4%	23%	19%
Sheffield	33%	33%	0%
Solihull	12%	18%	6%
South Tyneside	35%	33%	-2%
St Helens	29%	35%	6%
Stockport	19%	29%	10%
Sunderland	23%	31%	8%
Tameside	5%	33%	28%
Trafford	9%	35%	26%
Wakefield	9%	37%	28%
Walsall	15%	30%	15%
Wigan	0%	24%	24%
Wirral	8%	27%	19%
Wolverhampton	33%	28%	-5%
Overall	20%	31%	11%



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