

## County Council

14 December 2018

### Item 6(d) Notice of Motion from Ms Flynn

#### Women standing for Election – Briefing Note

2018 not only marks the centenary of the Representation of the People Act, allowing some women to vote and stand for election, but also the first General Election on 14 December 1918 at which all men and some women could stand and vote. Both these and other important anniversaries of events that helped shape democracy in the UK (listed below) have been recognised and celebrated by this Council in a number of ways.

February 1918	Representation of the People Act 1918 given Royal Assent, allowed women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification to vote. The same act abolished property and other restrictions for men, and extended the vote to all men over the age of 21. Additionally, men in the armed forces could vote from the age of 19. The electorate increased from eight to 21 million.
November 1918	Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act allowed women to stand for election to the House of Commons.
December 1918	General Election (on 14 December) at which women could vote and stand for the first time. 8.5 million women were eligible to vote (40% of the total population of women in the UK). Out of 1,623 candidates, 17 were women. One woman, Constance Markievicz, was elected but did not take her seat. The first woman MP to take her seat was Nancy Astor in 1919.
July 1928	Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act, gave women the right to vote at age 21 on the same terms as men.
April 1958	Life Peerages Act 1958, allowed women to sit in the House of Lords.

At the Council meeting in February 2018 the Chairman and Group Leaders spoke about the significance of the Representation of the People Act in 1918 and members wore the suffragette rosette to mark this. In March the Suffragette Flag was welcomed to County Hall by a number of the female county councillors, and during Local Democracy Week in July, a [film](#) encouraging women to stand for election and a 'talking heads' [podcast](#) were launched on the Council's '[Be a Councillor](#)' website, highlighting the role played by women councillors. In June 2018 the Council debated a notice of motion regarding women's representation in local government, and agreed to ask the Member Development Group to actively look at ways to encourage women together with other under-represented groups wanting to become councillors in West Sussex.

In addition, members have been engaging with the West Sussex Youth Cabinet in a number of activities during 2018 aimed at promoting local democracy and engagement with all young people, and it is planned that this programme of activities will continue into the future.

#### Notable Female County Councillors

- **Mrs Ellen Chapman** (1857-1925) and **the Hon Evelyn Cecil** (1884-1947) were the first women elected to the County Council, in March 1919 (for seats in Worthing and Bognor respectively). Ellen Chapman was also the first female

mayor in the county (in Worthing, 1920), the first woman to serve on a town council in West Sussex, Worthing's first female alderman, the first female president of the Worthing Boy Scouts Association and the first woman magistrate in Worthing. She also founded the Worthing Women's Franchise Society, a branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. Evelyn Cecil was married to an officer in the Grenadier Guards who was killed in action in 1914. She was also a Justice of the Peace, sitting as Magistrate on the Ixworth Bench.

- **Baroness Emmet** (1899-1980) was a member of the County Council from 1946-1967 and the first Chairman of the Children's Committee and also Chairman of the Child Guidance Committees.
- **Mrs Mary Lochner** was the first female Vice-Chairman of the Council, 1977-1981.
- **Mrs Amanda Clare** was the first female Leader of the Council, 1993-1997.
- **Mrs Margaret Johnson** was the first female Chairman of the County Council, 2001-2008.

## Female Representation

A report published in 2017 by the [Commission on Women in Local Government](#) (a partnership between the Fawcett Society and the LGiU) found that just one in three local councillors is a woman, and the pace of change is slow, going up by just 5% since 1997. The report made a number of recommendations to drive change to the Government, political parties, and local councils.

## West Sussex County Council

There were a total of 341 candidates for the 2017 County Council election. 232 of the candidates were male and 109 were female making almost a third of candidates female. Seven divisions (10%) had no female candidate. Council membership for the current and two previous administrations is set out below.

Year	Male	Female	Total
2017	47	23 (33%)	70
2013	51	20 (28%)	71
2009	52	19 (27%)	71

Four of the nine Cabinet members at the County Council are women (compared with a national average of 30%) and it has a female leader (17% nationally). The current percentage of female councillors in some near neighbouring county councils is: Buckinghamshire, 33%; East Sussex, 16%; Hampshire, 24%; Kent, 27%; and Surrey, 37%. None of these has a female leader.

## Member Development Working Group – Promoting Local Democracy

The Member Development Group has set up a cross-party working group leading on a three-year programme of activities in the build-up to the 2021 local council elections. The aim of the programme is to promote local democracy and the current focus for the working group is on exploring the barriers facing all people standing for election and identifying any actions the Council and others can take to reduce these. It is exploring all aspects of diversity, as well as gender, and ways to address the diversity of all people standing for election.

## Tony Kershaw

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