



**Barriers to female progression  
to senior positions within the 26  
district councils in  
Northern Ireland**

**By Denise McStravog**

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this report is to examine the nature and extent of barriers to women's progression to senior posts within the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland. Promoting equality of opportunity involves more than the elimination of discrimination as public authorities are obliged to have regard to the need for affirmative action to correct disadvantages among men and women under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

Following an extensive literature review, I chose to investigate barriers to female progression in local government through research into women's working experiences and attitudes as well as an examination of male and female employees' assessments of human resource policies and their practical application, organisational culture, promotion procedures, management styles and community support mechanisms.

Questionnaires were posted to 560 senior employees (both male and female) across the district councils in order to gain a broad understanding of employees' views and perceptions regarding barriers to female progression to senior posts in the 26 councils. The questionnaires received a 34.1% response rate. In order to further explore the main findings of the questionnaire, interviews were carried out via telephone with 10 male and 10 female employees.

The findings suggested that there has been significant improvement since previous research related to local government in Northern Ireland undertaken in 2004, especially in relation to increased female role models, available training opportunities and levels of awareness regarding councils' policies and procedures. My research also indicates that senior employees see the Review of Public Administration as a major threat for the progression of female staff within the new (reduced) council model, which will be implemented in 2009. The Review of Public Administration will expand current roles and bring back additional functions to local government and the

reduced council model will mean there will be less senior management positions available.

Moreover my findings suggested that senior female employees in local government underrate networking and mentoring. There also remains a strong feeling that family-friendly policies could have a detrimental effect on your career in the long-term and that they do not apply in practice to senior management posts which require extra responsibility, long hours and attendance at evening meetings.

To conclude a range of recommendations were put forward to help women to overcome barriers and enable them to progress into senior positions within the 26 district councils or the new council structure. These are personal development, mentoring schemes, the introduction of job rotation, reviewing council meeting structures and cultures, developing creative flexible working arrangements, introducing career counselling for all employees, extending the membership of SOLACE to employees in the second tier of local government and altering attitudes through the equality commission.

## Introduction

The aim of this research project is to identify the nature and extent of specific barriers that prevent women from progressing to senior positions within the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland. The barriers that prevent women from ascending to senior management positions in large corporations have often been described collectively by the metaphor “*the glass ceiling*”; a transparent barrier which thwarts women from moving up the corporate ladder past a certain point (Morrison et al, 1987).

In Northern Ireland, male staff members occupy 59% of all local government posts, with 41% of posts held by females (Hinds, 2005). At August 2006, there were only (28.8%) women among the 144 first and second tier posts in local government, equivalent to just 14%. As a result, in 54% of district councils in Northern Ireland – 14 out of 26 –no women occupy posts within the top two management tiers. At August 2006, there was just one female (recently appointed) Chief Executive within the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland. Since 1972 there has only been one other female Chief Executive within the district councils in Northern Ireland.

Under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 public authorities are required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- Persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- Men and women generally;
- Persons with disability and persons without;
- Persons with dependants and persons without.

Therefore promoting equality of opportunity involves more than the elimination of discrimination but public authorities are obliged to have regard to the need for affirmative action to correct disadvantage among particular sections in society.

The importance of this research is highlighted by the concurrent modernisation of local government in Northern Ireland which means that tackling the under-representation of women at senior levels is crucial, especially if management posts disappear as a result of the implementation of the Review of Public Administration in 2009 (Hinds, 2005). Excluding women from senior management positions means local government are not only missing out on talent but also relying on a narrow range of experience on which to base decisions that affect all our lives.

There is also understandable concern that women may disappear, or become much less visible, if management posts are reduced with a move to a smaller number of councils. For example if 1 female employee is competing against 7 male employees for a senior post, which could mean that the gender balance in the new council structures could be worse than at present as a result of the implementation of the Review of Public Administration.

This timely research project was conducted during the Year of Women in Local Councils (2006) and the inception of the Local Government Modernisation Taskforce and hence findings may be used to influence future policies, procedures and training and development opportunities for female local government employees.

## Secondary research

An extensive literature review and official statistics were undertaken regarding barriers to women's progression to senior positions, as it is important to learn more about previous research conducted in order to avoid reinventing the wheel and acknowledge analyses that are already available. The basic research of the literature concentrated from 1973 to 2006.

The glass ceiling was a term first used in the 1970's to describe the invisible barrier which exists within company organisational structures which prevent women gaining the top managerial posts (Hansard, 1990). There is now extensive literature on this topic with evidence from both the USA and Europe which indicates that women face obstacles in their careers which are not faced by their male counterparts (Davidson, 1999).

The first barrier identified is organisational culture. Secondary sources defined organisational culture as *"the realities, values, symbols and rituals held in common by members of an organisation and which contribute to the creation of norms and expectations of behaviour"* (Phillips, Little and Goodine, 1997). Organisational culture defines conduct within an organisation, determines what is and is not valued, and how authority is asserted (James and Saville-Smith, 1992).

The values which often underpin the majority of organisations, and thus define personal success, arguably include money, power and status. The corresponding behaviours include working long hours and putting in 'face time' (as proxies for productivity), competitiveness and a willingness to put work above all else (McKenna, 1997; Cornelius, 1998; Raggins et al, 1998).

McKenna (1997) and Cornelius (1998) argue that it is these values and behaviours that create the kind of organisational culture which many women find so inhospitable. Women, as well as many men, not only find this environment inhospitable but the patterns of interaction between staff members it creates as being potentially ineffective (Marshall, 1995). Women say that an inhospitable culture is one of the most significant barriers to their

advancement and a major factor in diminishing their satisfaction with work in large organisations (Phillips, Little and Goodine, 1997:571). Explanations for the extremely low numbers of women in the position of senior management positions go beyond corporate policies and practices but are also impacted by gender-based issues.

Maddock (1998) famously developed six different gender cultures as a result of research that was carried out by the NHS:

- **The Gentlemen's Club** - Reinforces the notion that the women's role is at home.
- **The Barrack Yard** – Hides real hostility towards women, manual workers and anyone possessing little power.
- **The Locker Room** – Is an exclusion culture, where men talk frequently about sport and make sexual references to confirm their heterosexuality.
- **The Gender Blind** – Culture encourages us to pretend that women have the same experiences as men.
- **Smart Macho** – Managers are dominated by a pressure to perform. They have no desire to block employee who can work 80 hours a week and deliver on time.
- **Paying Lip Service** – Public sector organisations which have well-developed equal opportunities policies have developed a new breed of men – men who think themselves as non-sexist. However they do little to promote or develop women.

Additionally the cultural stereotype of '*leadership is male*', presents a barrier to any woman who aspires to a leadership position. Despite the fact that many researchers have found that there are insignificant differences in the innate abilities of male and female managers (Dobbins and Platz, 1986), stereotypes that portray women as less capable leaders than men persist. The stereotypes come from the assumptions that there are widespread differences in abilities between women and men refer to a cultural prejudice that assumes that men are better suited for leadership positions (Heilman et al., 1989).

In contrast research conducted by Adler (1993) indicates that differences in men's and women's leadership styles are seen as particularly important in light of the trend toward flatter organisations, team-based management and increased globalization. Rosener (1990; 1995) and Adler (1993) make convincing arguments that women's interactive styles may represent a

different and important new approach to leadership that can and will be valuable to corporations as diversity and networking increase in our global economy.

Maddock's (1999) research in British local government was that there were common characteristics among the senior women managers she studied. They appeared to:

- Have a strategic approach to change
- Challenge structures
- Be less concerned with styles and more with social objectives and inclusive management
- Favour collaborate working
- Have a principled but hands-off approach which stimulated motivation among some and hostility among others.

It is important to recognise that the idea of male and female approaches to management and leadership may be regarded as stereotypical denying both men and women the opportunity to exercise different skills and attributes.

However there is also a good deal of evidence that women find themselves forced to adopt a male role model in order to succeed in their chosen profession (Davidson,1999). This requires the suppression of qualities which are seen as 'feminine': person-oriented and sensitive to other's needs.

The "*old boy's network*" is often cited as a barrier to female progression to senior posts as women at the top are often perceived as threats by their male colleagues in that they would advocate change from the status quo. The "*old boy's network*," is when women are excluded from informal networks because of their gender these are informal groups of male peers who provide each other with information, feedback, and contacts for necessary career advancement. A critical mass of women in top positions would be a threat to the "*old boy network*" which currently functions quite well in preserving and enhancing rewards for males at the top.

One way that women are kept out of 'old boy's network' is through the process of competency testing. Competency testing is a process by which a person is required to prove herself over and over again. Rosener (1995) reports that when conducting her research male senior executives, freely admitted that women in upper level positions were subjected to competency testing much more often than their male counterparts. This behaviour on the part of male executives could be seen as an attempt to band together to preserve the upper ranks as a predominantly male domain by sending the message to females who attempt to infiltrate their domain that they are less than welcome and will have to fight to gain entry.

Coffey et al (1999) found that women executives are frequently the only woman at their level. The sense of being a lone female voice was a frequent part of the experience of such women. Moreover women in upper management, comprising around 5% of upper managers, are almost always in the 'token' position. Tokens are subject to more on-the-job pressure and scrutiny than dominants because they are more visible to the rest of the group and that visibility increases performance pressures (Kanter,1977). Females in Chief Executive roles in local government in Northern Ireland could be described as token positions as females only make up 3.8% (one female in a total of 26 positions).

The psychological pressures of being a token cannot help but have a long-term negative effect on women's feelings and attitudes. Most importantly, for women seeking promotion or possibly aspiring to ascend to the CEO position, their minority status often makes it more difficult to tap into the information they need from informal sources and networks, creating yet another obstacle in the path toward further promotion.

Raggins et al. (1998) found that almost all (91%) of successful women CEOs interviewed said they had been mentored at some stage during their career, and almost as many (81%) expressed the opinion that mentors were "critical or fairly important" to career progression. These findings are in alignment with other evidence that individuals who are mentored are more frequently

promoted, have more career mobility and advance faster. This has implications for women who wish to become Chief Executives as precedent has demonstrated that of the first 15 female Chief Executives in local government the UK, fourteen were mentored (Riley, 1993).

Women in middle management often cite a lack of performance-based feedback as compared with their male colleagues, which may serve as an additional obstacle for further promotion (Catalyst, 1990). While alternatively, research conducted by Maddock (1998) argues that the actual experience of local government bureaucracy led many women in more junior positions to determine that promotion would be disadvantageous.

HR policies and practices were identified as a significant barrier to women's progression. A survey by Catalyst (1990) of human resource managers found that corporations were still not creating diversity initiatives or policies that effectively lessened the obstacles for women wishing to ascend through the ranks to senior management or chief executive positions.

Research conducted by Still's (1997) concluded that women feel "disadvantaged" compared with men in the areas of recruitment, selection, promotion and transfer, conditions of service and assessment of their personal qualities (perceived as relevant to promotion decisions). Men in Still's research, on the other hand, felt that women were given equal opportunities to progress, and that the organisational culture was supportive of their career aspirations.

Studies indicate that obstacles to progression arise only after the first five years of women's careers when men's compensation, promotion and job satisfaction begins to surge ahead. Women face certain challenges at work: female characteristics and stereotypes are viewed negatively, and their minority status increases their visibility (Riley, 1993). In addition, as women enter paid employment their male partners tend not to assume an equitable share of the housework and child care.

Many organisations have family-friendly policies to alleviate the pressures of combining work and family life; however employees can be reluctant to access these because of the possible impact on their career. Schwartz (1994) indicates that women assume that career penalties would result from using family-friendly policies, but she also concludes that use is actually career enhancing in that it provides a means for women to remain attached to the workforce. She adds that using family-friendly policies will be mediated by both individual attitudes and by corporate culture.

However, it seems that beliefs about career commitment and what it takes to make a valuable contribution have not evolved in tandem with family-friendly policies. In spite of espoused changes that value team work and co-operation over command and control management style, traditional beliefs about the nature of work persists and include notions such as:

- commitment to career and organisation is demonstrated by 'face time';
- presence (long hours) is the best indicator of productivity;
- 'real' work can only be accomplished full-time; and
- those who are 'serious' will be available at all times (Schwartz 2004).

Research conducted by (Riley, 1993) argues that work / family conflict is frequently cited as an obstacle to female employment and promotion opportunities. The long hours culture or “child blind” organisation timetable supports the habit of early morning and evening meetings out of more regular “9-5” hours potentially making attendance difficult for women.

The presence of a partner and children impact differently on women and men's careers. Tharenou (1995) found that women were more likely to become Chief Executive Officers or top managers when they had fewer external ties in terms of spouse or children.

Research into women's barriers to senior positions indicates that women's lack of confidence is one of the main inhibiting factors in women's career development and the main reason why some people think that women are their own “worst enemies” (Powell 1993). Past literature examining women's

progression states that women do tend to have a lower expectation in the workplace than their male colleagues (Davidson, 1993).

Research specifically related to local government in Northern Ireland carried out between Derry City Council and Donegal County Council in December 2004 has shown that there were positive perceptions about managers being supportive; however there were low levels of feedback, appraisal and career planning provided in discussions with female staff which prevented realistic self-assessment of potential. Additionally, women did not demonstrate a confident and pro-active approach to availing of the opportunities which already existed such as widening work experience in these councils to increase job competence. There were also low levels of awareness of family-friendly policies and a lack of implementation of these at senior levels; promotional procedures were not seen as objective, as the process was not seen to be fair or transparent (McMurray, 2004).

Research by the Local Government Staff Commission in Northern Ireland also conducted in 2004 indicated the following difficulties for women officers in local government in Northern Ireland:

- highly visible institutionalised sexism / stereotyping;
- male dominated cultures in terms of both staff and political representation;
- lack of recognition of feminine management styles as valid by male managers;
- male arrogance and “boys club” mentality;
- culture and stereotypes which fostered genuine barriers to progression;
- long hours and evening meeting culture which restricted positive work / life balance;
- undermining women’s work and value through use of inappropriate language e.g. use of the term “wee girl”;
- male bosses bypassing women managers in favour of lower-graded male staff;
- male bullying that affected women’s confidence;

- reluctance by women to progress in local government where robust debate verged on harassment;
- academic qualifications seen to be prized more highly than competence.

Other research like that conducted by Pointer (1996) suggested that most women in senior positions in Local Government in England claimed that they had been discriminated against at some stage in their career. I aim to research this area further in this report.

The literature has illustrated are two very different categories of causation in explanations and theories concerning the lack of women in senior positions. The first category cover behavioural and cultural causes, these revolve around issues of stereotyping, tokenism, power and preferred leadership styles.

The second category concerns barriers created by corporate practices. Barriers stem from objective, and therefore easier to change, causes of gender imbalance that often tend to favour the recruitment, retention, and promotion of males over females, especially in jobs that comprise the typical career paths of a future senior manager.

Thus the literature has supplied some answers for the lack of female progression along the management scale in Northern Ireland local government. However, despite the negative picture portrayed in previous research conducted specifically related to local government in Northern Ireland, the current Review of Public Administration provides a serious threat as management posts may be reduced following implementation of the 7 councils in 2009.

## **Section 1: Research**

### **Research aims and objectives**

The aim of this research is to identify real or perceived barriers for women in senior management within local government in Northern Ireland. This research also aims to identify practices which can be put in place to help overcome the barriers to women's progression within the 26 district council or the new (reduced) council model. Additionally the research will identify if there are any barriers to women's progression which are specific to the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland. This research is imperative as the gender balance in new council structures could be worse than at present as a result of the implementation of the Review of Public Administration. Therefore this research project will:

- Carry out research related to barriers to women's progression and that specifically related to the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland
- Use a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, in order to analyse what are the barriers to women's progression within the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland
- Analyse the outcomes of the questionnaire related to barriers to progression for women with the 26 district councils
- Conduct telephone interviews with a 10 male and 10 female senior employees across the 26 district councils as qualitative case studies to build on the quantitative findings of the questionnaire
- Analyse whether the report highlights that women's opportunities for progression within local government in Northern Ireland has increased, remained the same or lessened since previous research related specifically to local government in Northern Ireland
- Develop a range of recommendations to remove barriers for women aspiring to advance into senior management and leadership positions
- Identify areas for further research.

To achieve these objectives 560 postal questionnaires were dispatched across the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland in July 2006. The questionnaire used in the research was adapted from a comparative research project previously conducted by Anne McMurray Consulting Ltd in June 2004 between Derry City Council and Donegal County Council to identify any barriers that exist for women in local government.

## **Questionnaire**

For this research, I adapted a questionnaire originally designed by Anne McMurray Consulting, the methodology of which utilised qualitative design to probe and test out people's perceptions. Given the complex and subjective nature of people's perceptions and the different ways in which people interpret experiences, the questionnaire was structured to capture quantitative information via the following sections:

1. Doing your job (testing individuals' agreement with pre-determined statements on experiences and perceptions gained in fulfilling their current role e.g. treatment by colleagues, contribution valued, experience of bias, etc)
2. Exploring barriers (allowing individuals to indicate their agreement with statements about their council's organisational culture, policies, promotional strategies, management style, family and community support and women's own attitudes)
3. About you (capturing respondent profile information such as age, sex, length of service, etc)
4. Your views (which provided space for respondents to comment further in their own words)

A copy of the questionnaire form issued is enclosed in appendix 1 and the results of the questionnaire are enclosed in appendix 2.

Throughout the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate their levels of agreement with statements describing attitudes or behaviours. They were

also able to add personal comments to provide actual examples and stories from their experience to illustrate their opinions (highlighted in the orange boxes throughout this report). At the end of each section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to put forward ideas about how councils, women themselves and the wider community could address any potential barriers and make a positive difference to women's working experiences (highlighted in the pink boxes throughout this report).

The questionnaires were adapted from Anne McMurray's original template to enable the survey to be completed within approximately ten minutes, in an attempt to guarantee a high response rate (which was ultimately approx. 34% overall). During the survey pilot, participants were timed to ensure that the questionnaire could be completed fully within the ten minute timeframe.

Questionnaires were directed to staff on salary scale PO3, that is, those receiving remuneration of £29,859 or above per annum (see Appendix 3 for Breakdown of Salary Scales). A general background letter (see appendix 4) and stamped address return envelope was also appended, addressed to each of the officers who were being asked to complete the questionnaire as part of the research. All the questionnaires were mailed out to each officer individually except for 4 councils who distributed their questionnaire to staff on salary grade PO3 and above through their HR department, who supplied distribution figures in return.

## **Research Methodology and Data analysis**

The research title for this management project was originally "*why are there so few female Chief Executives in local government in Northern Ireland?*" Following an extensive literature review it was decided to change the project title since the finding indicated that there were only 20 (14%) women among the 144 first and second tier posts in local government and that the barriers experienced by female chief executives were likely to be the same for females at the second tier of local government (senior and director level). Therefore

senior positions within this report are defined as senior positions in first and second tier of local government officers (chief executive and directorial level).

This management project uses a combination of qualitative research (interviews) and quantitative research (using existing research and postal questionnaire surveys). Using this combined method will mean that the data sources can complement each other and I will have the opportunity to check the information to see if the various sources provide the same results or in fact different results. Additionally it was recognised that the most important disadvantage of the postal questionnaire is the low response rate and studies which directly compare telephone and face-to-face interviewing tend to conclude that telephone interviewing produces data which are at least comparable in quality to those attained by the face-to-face method (Velde, 2004).

Despite the limitations associated with these methods they were considered appropriate for this management project which enabled gathering a wide range of senior employee's views and perspectives from across the 26 district councils in a short space of time at minimum cost.

Purposive sampling was used to select senior employees within the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland. Patton (1990) defines purposive sampling as when subjects are selected because of similar characteristics i.e. their position and gender. The results from the purposive sampling resulted in an unequal balance between male and female senior employees (480, male and 280 female). Therefore quota sampling was used to gain an equal balance (280 females and 280 males). Quota sampling is described by Velde (2004) as when convenience or judgement sampling is used to select the required number of subjects from each section.

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyse the quantified data captured from the postal questionnaire responses, from which reports in graphical and tabular format were generated and transferred into Microsoft Excel in order to present the results of the survey. This is supported by the collection of case studies from 10 female and 10 male officers from

across the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland gleaned through telephone interviews.

Questionnaire distribution for this project aimed to target senior female and male staff on salary scale “PO3” and above (i.e. receiving remuneration of £29,859 or above per annum). The rationale for choosing to survey this salary grade was that there was not a sufficient number of female staff at director level to provide a suitable sample size. Additionally, surveying all staff on the PO salary scale would have produced a large sample range beyond the remit of this management project (see table one below) and unreflective in terms of my research focus on senior management opinion.

**Table 1 Percentage of men and women employed in the district councils by grade in 1998, 2002 and 2005**

Grade	1998		2002		2005		Total					
	%M	%F	%M	%F	%M	%F	1998	%	2002	%	2005	%
CEx/CO	95	5	91	9	84	16	219	2	172	2	180	2
<b>PO</b> →	72	28	65	35	61	39	556	6	827	9	1116	11
SO1/2	58	42	55	45	49	51	663	7	880	9	891	9
Scales 3-6	38	62	38	62	35	65	1675	18	2195	24	2623	26
Manual, Craft & Scales 1-2	66	34	65	35	74	26	5962	66	5236	56	5302	52
<b>Total</b>	61	39	58	42	60	40	9075	100	9310	100	10112	100

Source: Local Government Staff Commission, 2004

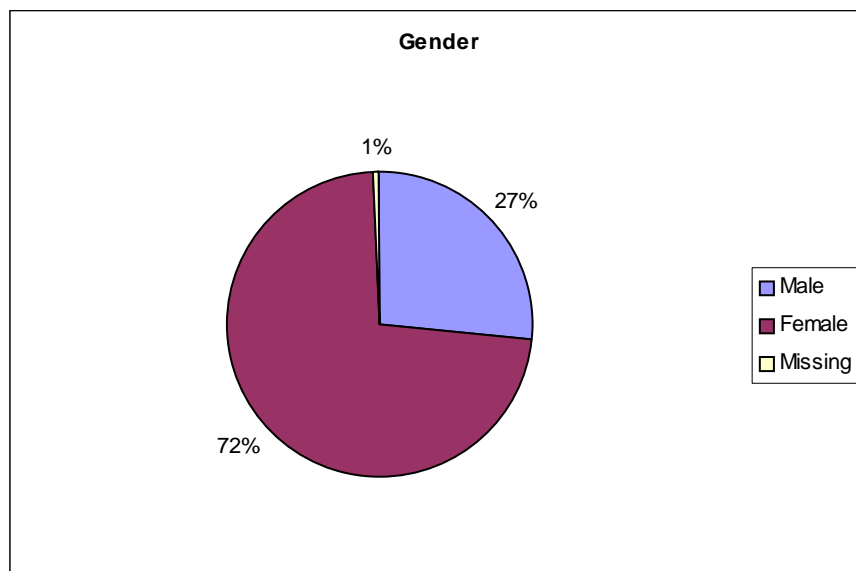
The questionnaire was issued to 280 female and 280 male senior employees, to elicit their views on the nature of any real or perceived barriers to female management progression within local government, and to point to a positive way forward for the future. Responses from male managers across the council areas was vital to adequately reflect male perceptions and allow comparisons between male and female perceptions of the same issue. The qualitative approach of the questionnaire sought to probe underlying and surface individual perceptions and to establish trends.

## Profile of Respondents

The results presented in this document are based primarily on the 191 responses received, 140 (72%) of which were from females and 51(27%) from males (see diagram 1 below). Hence full responses were received from 49.9% of females and 18.2% of males surveyed. The 18.2% response rate from male employees highlighted that even though the questionnaire was specifically about female barriers to progression within the 26 district councils, males also felt that the issue was relevant and applied to the questionnaire. Three further questionnaires arrived after the closing date and were not included in the results presented within this report. The questionnaire received an overall response rate of 34.1% which demonstrates a positive level of interest in the issue as the average response rate for a postal questionnaire is 30% (Gorard 2003). It should also be noted that this research was conducted during the summer holiday leave period which very likely affected the response rate.

Diagram 1

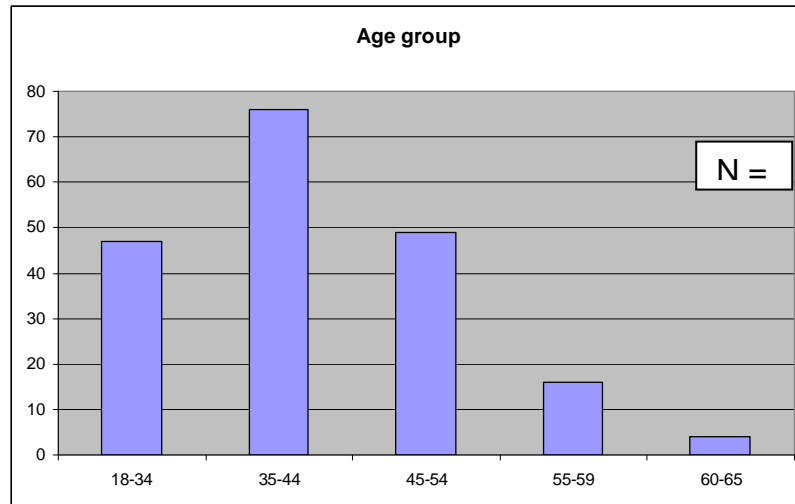
### Gender Profile



76 [39.7%] of the questionnaires returned were from staff between the ages of 35-44 years and 48 [25.1%] questionnaires were from staff between the ages of 18-34 years. As illustrated in diagram 2 below, responses received were

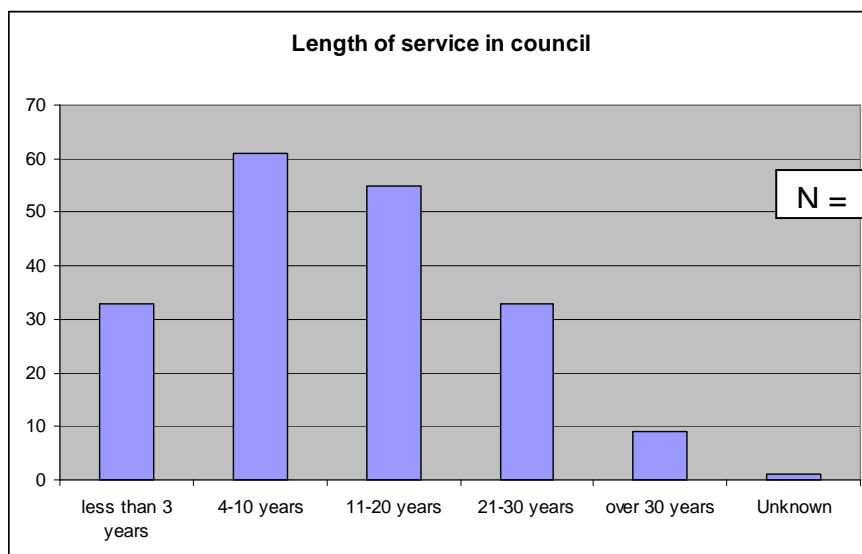
from a wide range of age groups currently working within the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland.

Diagram 2 **Age of Respondents**



Moreover, 61 [31.9%] respondents had worked in their council for between 4-10 years, while 55 [28.7%] respondents had worked in their council for between 11-20 years, therefore the survey results were also derived from a range of respondents with different lengths of service within the 26 district councils as shown in diagram 3 below:

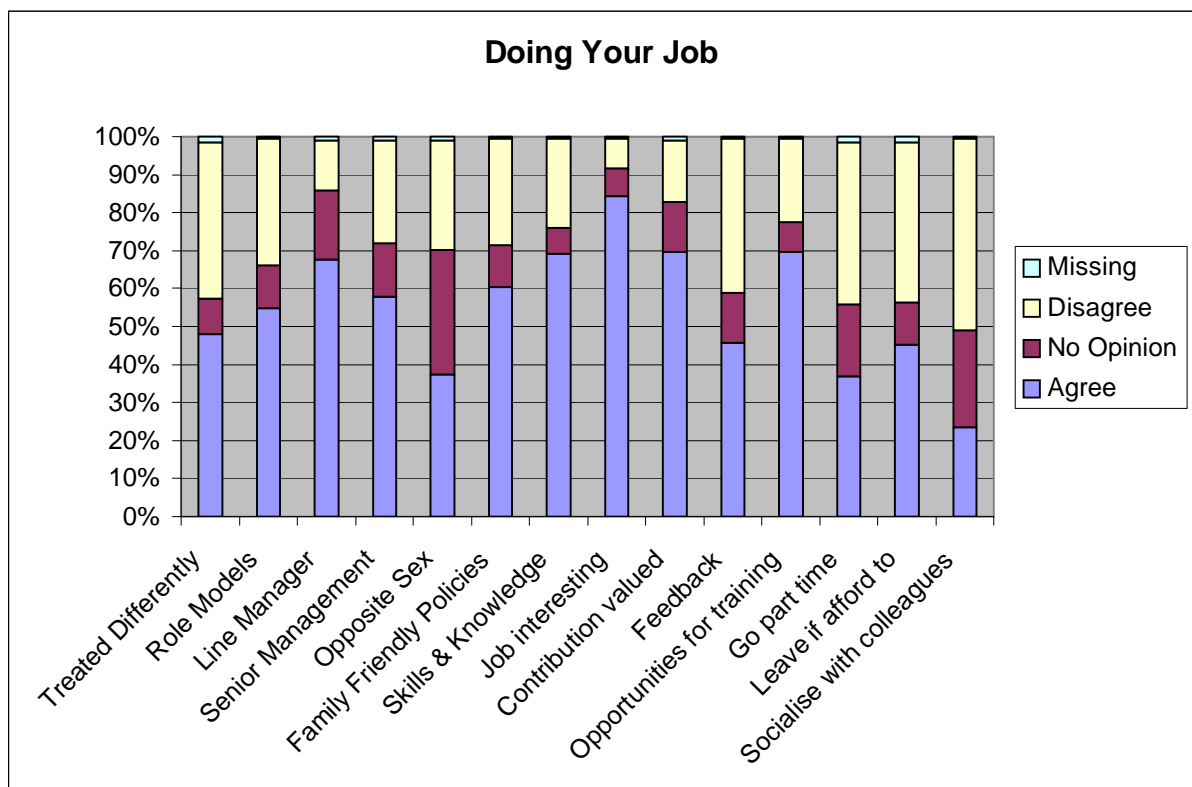
Diagram 3 **Respondents length of service**



## “Doing your job” – women’s experiences of working for councils

The aim of this section of the questionnaire was to explore women’s experiences in working for their councils, and to test for potential barriers regarding their progression and their assessment of how such barriers operated. The results of this section are illustrated in the diagram 4 below:

Diagram 4 **Experiences in doing your job**



At the time of the survey, 67.7% of respondents believed that line managers and supervisors are positive and encouraging to women employees. Additionally, 57.8% percent believed that senior council managers were also encouraging to women employees. 65.1% of staff felt confident that they could raise any issues and discuss them openly with their line managers. Moreover, 69.8% of respondents believed that their contribution was valued within their council.

Additionally 60.4% of individuals believed that they were kept informed regarding their council’s family friendly policies and the ways in which these

could benefit staff within their current role. This suggests that methods of communicating family friendly policies within local government are, on the whole, effective.

54.7% of questionnaires received indicated a belief that there were positive female role models in senior positions within councils to whom staff could relate. One comment which illustrates this is:

***“A notable glass ceiling –more assistant female directors has helped. This is making a difference to attitudes held.”***

The majority of respondents, 69.8%, stated that there was a wide enough range of training opportunities to meet the needs of female senior members of staff in local government. However, 40.6% of those who completed the survey asserted that they did not get feedback and coaching on the job from their line manager or supervisor. Arguably, this may leave managers of either sex lacking a realistic assessment of their current performance and potential ability on which to base career expectations. The lack of feedback on performance was also highlighted in the literature review as an obstacle to further promotion.

42.7% of responses received were from individuals who did not believe that they could change from full-time work to part-time employment if sought for personal or family requirements. Comments regarding this issue also suggested that staff changing to part-time hours would be expected to carry out a full-time role despite only being contracted for part-time hours.

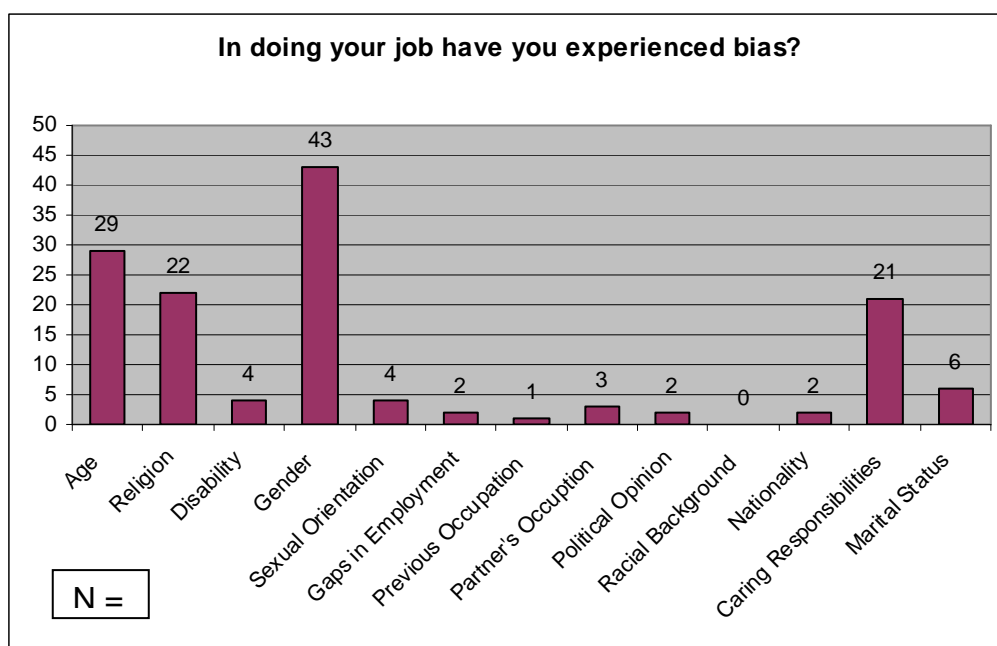
50.5% of respondents did not think it was important for their job to socialise with colleagues outside of work. As most survey respondents were women, this result suggests that networking with colleagues outside of working hours is not regarded as important by women. The consequence of this may be that women participate less in informal business networking opportunities, which are important sources of information about organisational and sector activities.

By not participating in these, women may be excluding themselves from sources of organisational information and influence.

While perception expressed by males and females regarding their current job was similar for many questions within this section, there was one notable except - 83 of the 140 female respondents (or 59.2% of females) believed that they were treated differently than men whereas only 8 of the 51 male respondents (or 16% of males) agreed with this statement.

The questionnaire asked female respondents whether they had experienced bias while fulfilling their current job role. 43 [30.7%] respondents believed that in doing their job they had experienced bias because of their gender, while 29 [20.7%] respondents felt they had been subject to bias because of their age. The full results for the question asked are illustrated in the diagram 5 below:

**Diagram 5 Discrimination in carrying out your current job**



Discrimination and bias were also identified in Pointer's (1996) research which was specifically related in local government officers in England and identified that female employees felt that they had be discriminated against at some point in their career.

The main findings from this section seem contradictory in part as managers and supervisors are regarded as individually positive, supportive and approachable if any issues need to be discussed. However, women still perceived themselves as being treated differently than men within councils in Northern Ireland. This suggests that there are barriers to female progression at senior level positions in local government because of the historical culture within the organisation.

### **Awareness of local government policies and practices**

Respondents were asked to insert a score which indicated their level of awareness of their council’s human resource policies and practices, using a scale from 0-5 where “0” represented “*never heard of it*” and “5” represented “*fully aware*”. This aimed to test how far respondents are aware of the policies and procedures in place to support staff in their workplace. The research grouped together those who indicated 3 (aware), 4 (largely aware) and 5 (fully aware) into percentages to indicate the respondent’s knowledge and awareness of Councils’ policies and practices. These aggregated results are highlighted in the table 2 below:

Table 2

### **Employees awareness of local government policies and procedures**

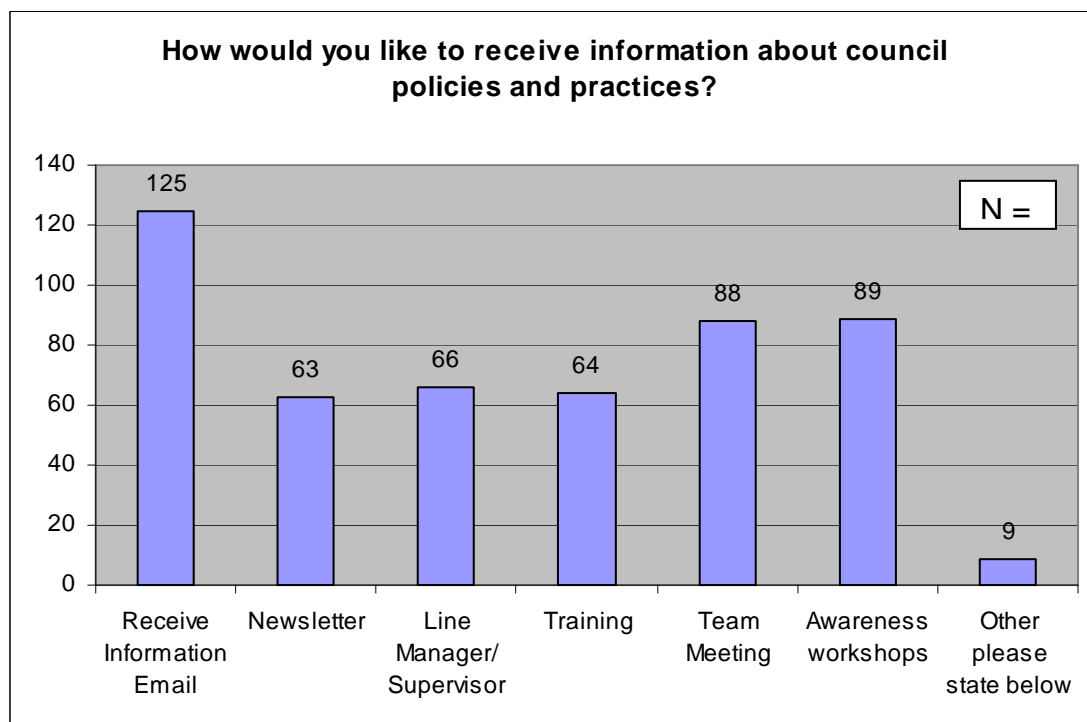
<b>Policy and Procedure Awareness</b>	<b>% Awareness</b>
Recruitment & selection	87.0%
Training and development	83.4%
Promotion	49.5%
Equal opportunities	88.0%
Equal pay legislation	64.1%
Maternity and paternity leave arrangements / pay	76.6%
Job share opportunities	68.4%
Family friendly policies	66.7%

As shown above, responses indicated a high level of awareness about recruitment and selection procedures [87%], training opportunities [83.4%],

equal opportunities [88%] and job sharing opportunities [68.2%]. This emphasises that staff education and training regarding these policies and procedures takes place effectively across the 26 district councils within Northern Ireland. This is a significant finding as previous research in 2004 indicated that staff had a low level of awareness of policies and practices within their councils. At the other end of the spectrum, the lowest level of awareness regarding policies was surrounding promotion at 49.5%. Therefore Councils should do more to increase the level of awareness regarding this area. How they can inform members of staff regarding policies and practices is outlined in diagram 6. Further research regarding the promotional process in councils is analysed in section 2 of this report.

In one part of the questionnaire respondents were asked how they would like to receive information regarding council policies and practices. This is illustrated in diagram 6 below:

Diagram 6                      **How would you like to receive information about Council policies and practices**



125 responses indicated a preference to receiving information about council policies and practices via email, 89 through awareness workshops and 88 through team meetings (respondents were able to select more than one method).

Respondents were also asked to provide suggestions on ways in which women themselves, councils and the wider community could ensure that women were able to successfully reach their potential within their current jobs. Recurring suggestions are highlighted below, and the full list of responses to this question is enclosed in Appendix 5.

**Things that women could do for themselves:**

- Network better
- Be proactive in seeking advice from other women managers
- Ask for opportunities to job-shadow
- Train to move outside of traditional clerical officer /receptionist mindset

**Things that the council could do:**

- Provide more feedback directly on job performance
- Introduce job rotation to allow women to become multi-disciplinary in terms of skills and experience
- Ensure work is evenly distributed and opportunities for career development are promoted
- Provide workshops for male directors to educate them about the difficulties women face
- Elected members should be less sexist in their views and comments

**Things that the wider community could do:**

- Elect more women councillors
- Examine the “green book” handbook of local government terms and conditions, to consider shift workers on SOI scale for enhanced pay and weekend enhancements
- Government policy should be improved to put carers on a par with parents /families
- Recognise women as equal to men and raise expectations
- Complain less and appreciate more, status of local government employees in society is not good – they are public servants
- Discourage the culture of long working hours

## ***Section 2: Exploring Barriers***

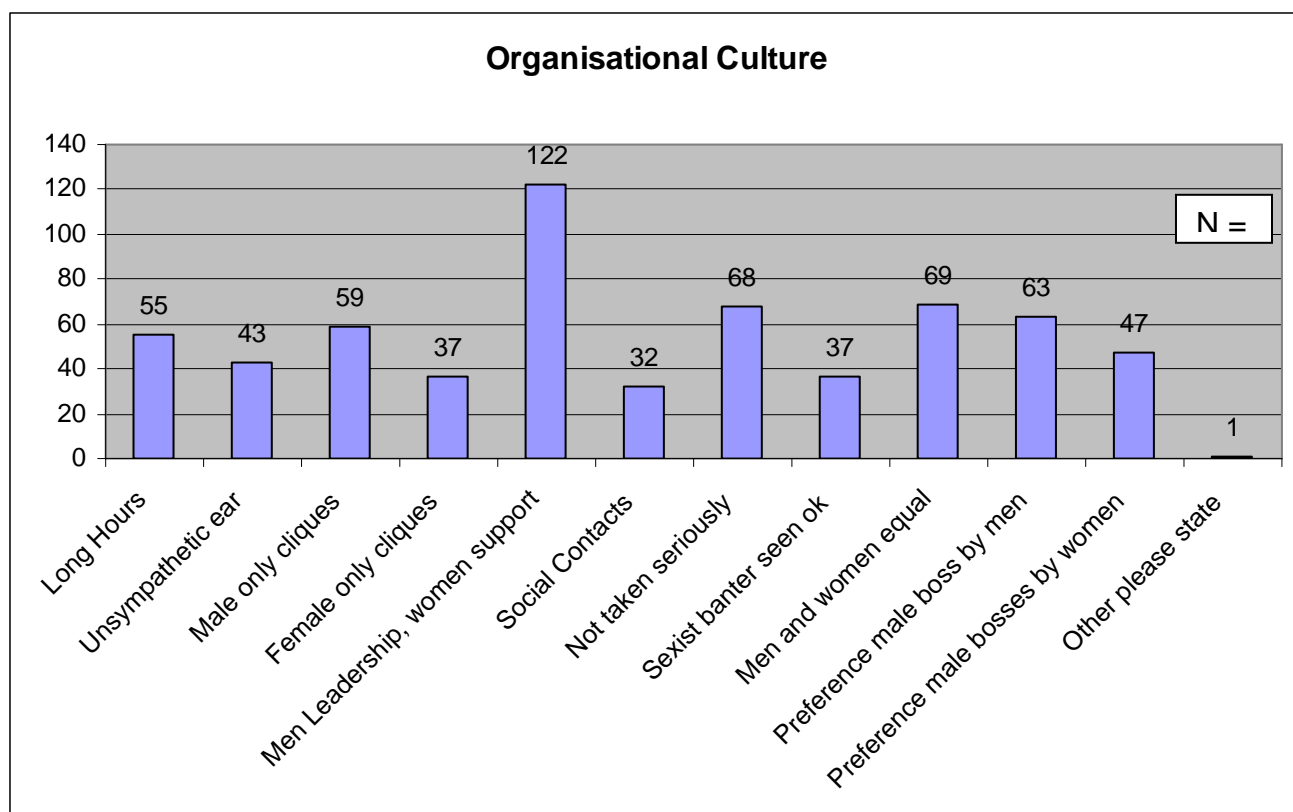
### **Exploring Barriers - Digging Deeper**

This section of the questionnaire tested the level to which potential barriers that had been identified in previous research were the same as those experienced across the 26 district councils. Barriers identified included organisational culture, promotion processes, management style, family or community support and women's own attitudes to progression. This section tested the hypothesis that six potential barriers prevent women's progression to senior management within local government by probing respondents' experiences. This also enables respondents to express any views that the survey structure had not so far elicited.

### **Organisational Culture**

Respondents were asked to tick the characteristics which best described the culture within the council at which they were employed. The results derived are illustrated in the diagram 7 overleaf:

## Examples of Prominent/ Perceived Organisational Culture



122 out of the total 191 [63.8%] survey respondents felt that within their council men tended to be placed in leadership roles while women were in supporting roles. Only 69 [36.1%] respondents felt that men and women were treated equally in the council. This emphasises the cultural stereotype of *'leadership is male'* as argued by Platz (1986). Akin to findings from the "doing your job" section, 68.6% of the male respondents felt that men and women are treated equally in councils in Northern Ireland while only 25% of female respondents at the same agreed with this statement.

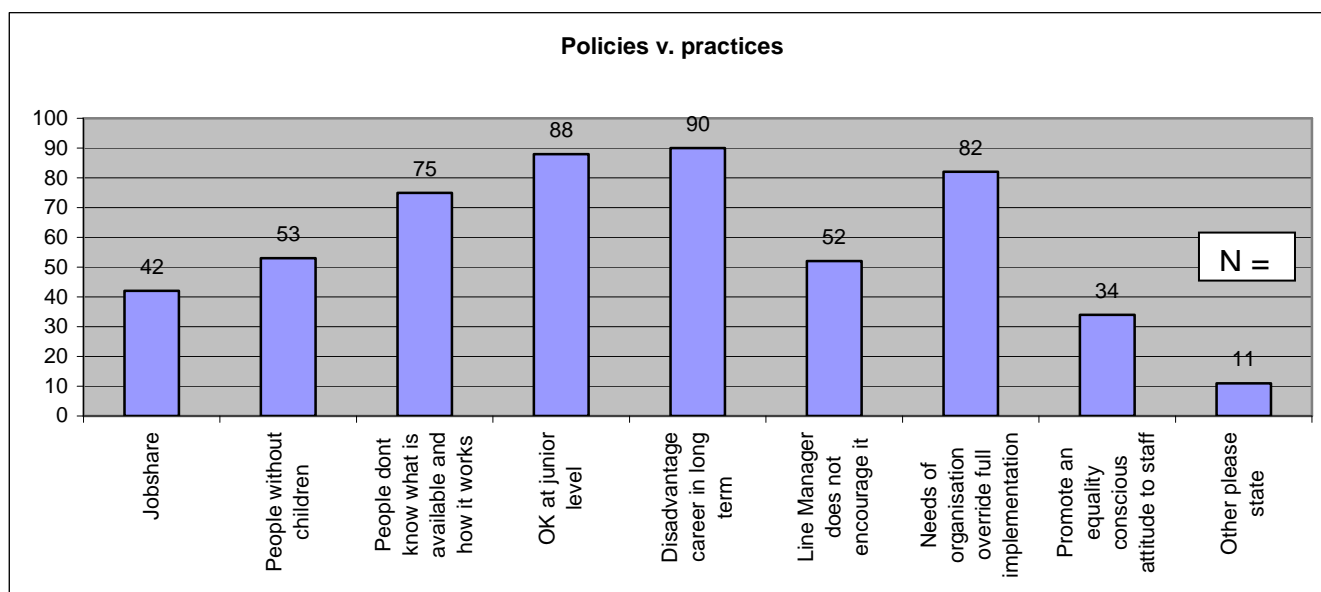
68 [35.6%] respondents believed that women's leadership was not taken seriously by men within councils and 55 [28.7%] respondents felt that long working hours and an expectation of remaining at work beyond 5pm was a barrier to progression for women aiming for senior posts within the 26 councils.

Attitudes in the council are changing this process as more positive female roles are emerging (according to 54.7% of survey respondents who agreed with this assessment). Previous research in these areas suggested that females in senior posts will help change the culture from within the organisations. Additionally this is also an improvement on findings from previous research conducted in 2004, which suggested there were not enough female role models for staff to relate to.

## Policies v. practices

This section of the questionnaire tried to gain an understanding of why councils' family-friendly policies and work life balance policies have not been taken up by senior staff. In this section, respondents were asked to tick the reasons why they felt employees did not take up family-friendly policies or work life balance policies. The full results are illustrated in diagram 8 below:

Diagram 8 Policies v Practices



90 [47.1%] of the 191 respondents felt that family-friendly policies could disadvantage your career in the long term as they would be seen as not being committed to the organisation. The comments that illustrate this from peoples' experience are:

***“Some women genuinely believe that availing of family friendly policies will ultimately work against them”.***

82 [42.9%] of respondents felt that the overall needs of the organisation and service delivery override full implementation of family friendly policies within the councils.

88 [46%] respondents felt that flexible working and job share were acceptable at junior levels but they did not apply in practice to supervisors and those in senior management positions. In support of earlier findings within my research, council employees appear to be aware of the policies available to them but are unsure how they could be applied to their job and believe that organisational needs override the full implementation of these policies.

In contrast there appears to be negative attitudes concerning the uptake of family friendly policies within the councils. This could have to do with the historical culture and attitudes within councils.

The comments that illustrate this from peoples' experience are:

***“The word balance is ignored in relation to family friendly policies as the needs of the individual seem to override the needs of the service and the other employees involved.”***

As argued in the literature review by Schwartz, 2004) the difficulty women have in combining paid work with primary responsibility for dependant care is interpreted by some as a lack of women's commitment to paid work, rather than a problem with the way in which work is structured. Commitment is generally attributed to those who are willing to work long hours, to undertake extended travel, and to put the needs of the organisation first. Employees who demonstrate commitment in this way are also seen to be highly productive. Given women's primary care-giving responsibilities, the use of

such criteria can lead to perceptions that women lack commitment and the same potential as their male counterparts.

Difficulties have also been highlighted regarding the creation of family-friendly policies which appear to be geared towards those with young children and fail to consider those caring for older relatives.

The comments that illustrate this from peoples' experience are:

***“As someone who has supported elderly parents I feel the policies are geared towards those with young children”.***

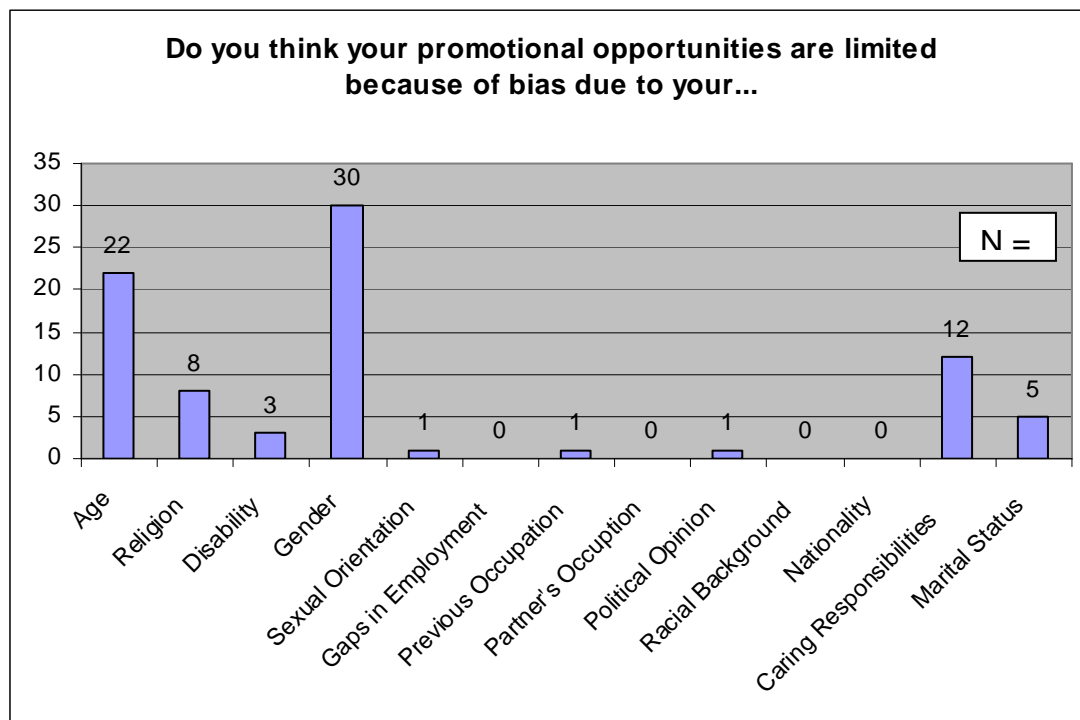
There needs to be a better understanding of the challenges facing women with families. Policies such as flexible working and family-friendly policies should be actively encouraged beyond junior level, within the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland and apply to those who care for elderly or disabled relatives.

The literature review also highlighted that policies were still not effectively combating the obstacles for women wishing to ascend through the ranks. While councils do have these policies in place, they need to do more to ensure that these work effectively and are taken up by both male and female employees at senior level.

### **Promotion processes**

The questionnaire issued for this investigation into the situation in Northern Ireland local government asked respondents whether they felt they were provided with limited promotional opportunities as a result of bias. The results obtained are illustrated in the diagram 9 below:

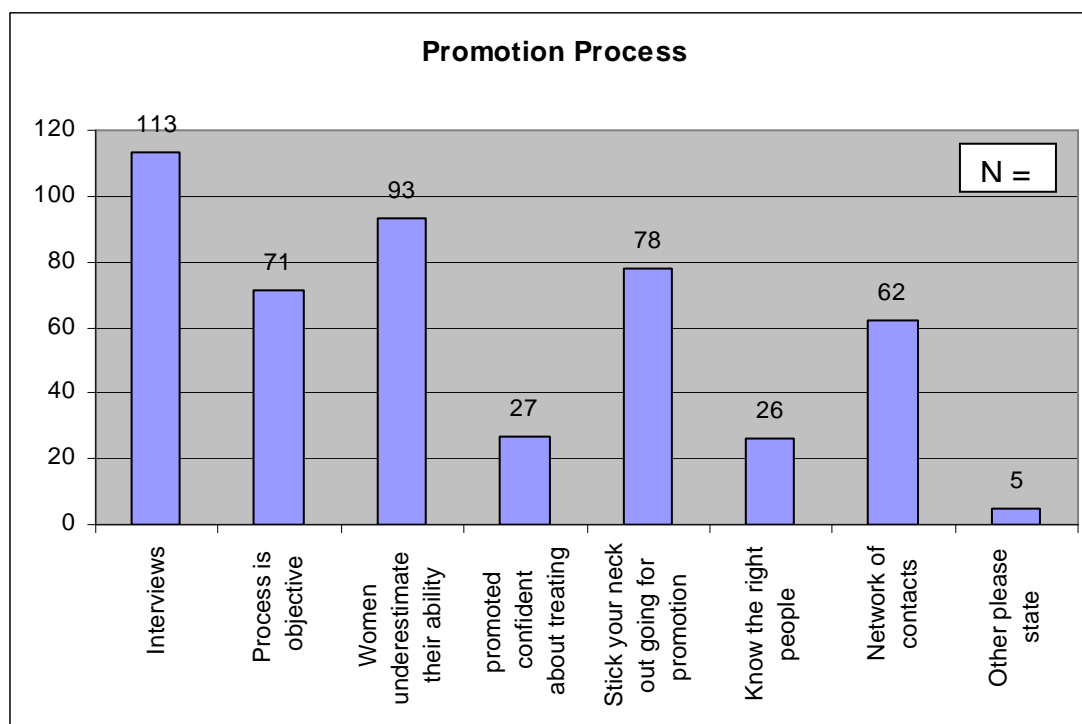
## Bias experienced during promotional process



30 [15.7%] respondents felt they had experienced limitations in terms of promotional opportunities because of their gender, while 22 [11.5%] felt this was because of their age and 12 [6.2%] because of their caring responsibilities. These top three areas were the same areas highlighted in which women felt they had experienced bias in doing their job.

Previous research indicates that promotion mechanisms have been raised as a potential barrier to female career progression within councils (Catalyst, 1990). When asked about this issue in the questionnaire, respondents used pre-established statements to indicate where they had experienced or observed potential barriers to female progression within the promotion process. The results are highlighted in diagram 10 below:

Diagram 10 **The Promotion Process**



113 [59.1%] respondents felt that women find it hard to present themselves effectively to colleagues at interview. 93 [48.6%] respondents also felt that within councils women do not apply for promotion because they underestimate their ability, particularly female respondents. 80 [57.1%] female respondents agreed while only 12 [23.5%] out of the 51 males felt this was the case). 78 respondents felt that individuals needed to “stick their neck out” to go for a promotion and 71 respondents, mostly female, felt it difficult to accept the promotion process within councils as objective. The comments that illustrate this from peoples’ experience are:

***“There tends to be a mistrust about the transparency of systems for recruitment, promotion and opportunity – it tends to happen for expediency or there is a view that ‘if your face fits’ you stand a better chance”.***

Respondents were then asked to make suggestions which would help more women to progress within the council through promotional procedures. Significant points are highlighted below; additionally the full list is enclosed in appendix 6. Others experiences and opinions are enclosed in appendix 7.

**Things that women could do for themselves:**

- Apply for jobs
- Be more pro-active
- Finding a female mentor who has time to spare is difficult but would be a good idea
- Regularly apply for internal posts
- Refuse to accept work dumped on them by colleagues so they can prove excellence in the work they are employed to do
- Say no when timescales are unrealistic
- Have fast-track systems in the new super councils for graduates
- Apply for promotions don't assume someone else will get it
- Sit on voluntary committees, boards of charities
- Go for jobs to get interview practice
- Establish a higher public profile

**Things that the council could do:**

- Be more transparent about career opportunities and adopt a consistent approach to filling vacancies
- Have clear competency profiles of what senior positions need. Remove the long hours and that associated with the jobs
- Offer more fixed term secondments, highlight women achievers
- Develop a better promotional plan for staff
- Allow those in higher positions to avail of reduced hours etc – lead by example
- Ensure policies are equitable and stop the 'old boy's network'

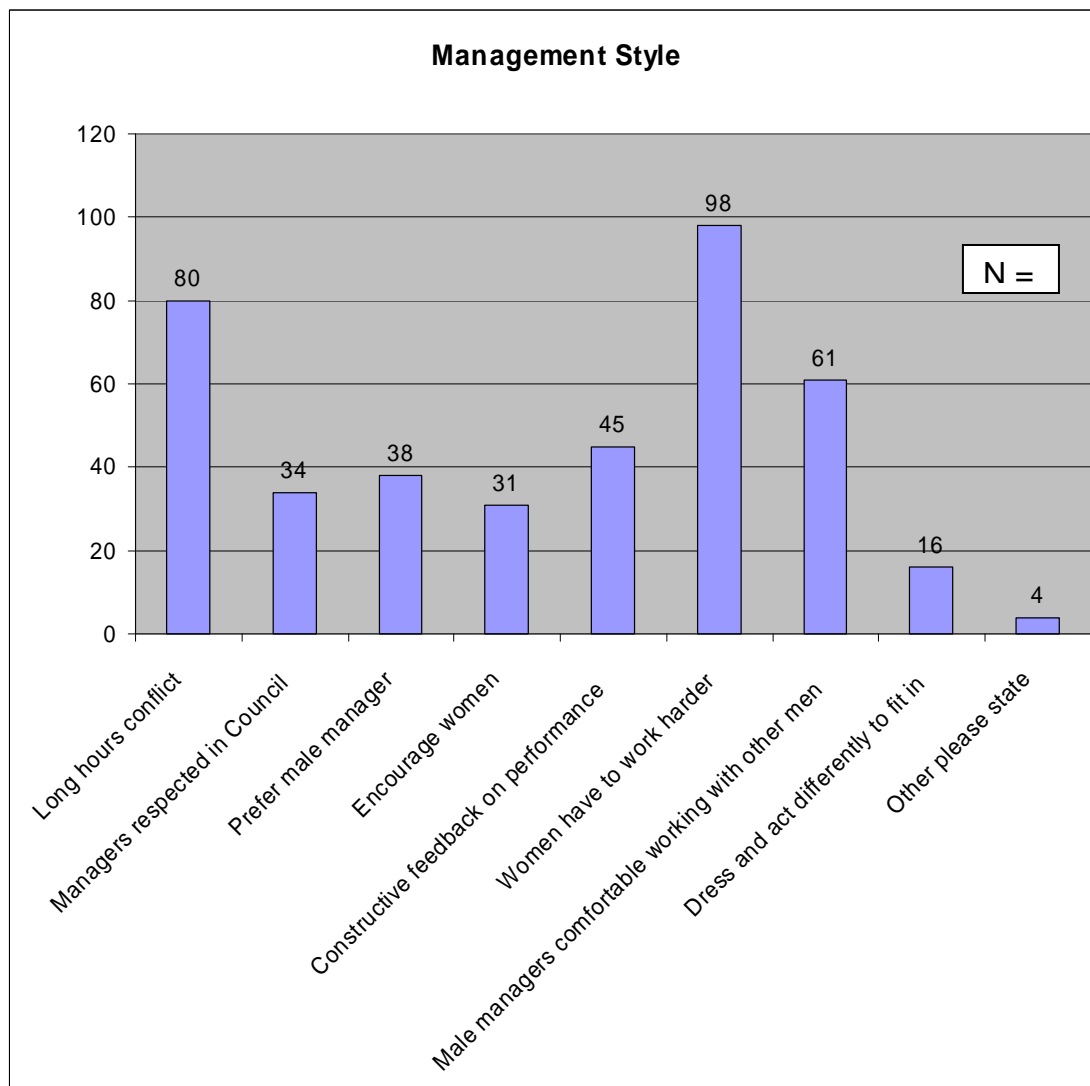
**Things that the wider community could do:**

- Reduce the amount of hours required. Why do meetings need to be held in evenings?
- More workshops, conferences on encouraging women's self confidence
- Revisit volunteer policy which states that employees over scale 6 must have council permission to do voluntary work

**Management style**

This section of the questionnaire aimed to explore respondents' experiences of management style especially in relation to encouraging women to develop their potential. This is illustrated in diagram 11 below:

Diagram 11 Management Style



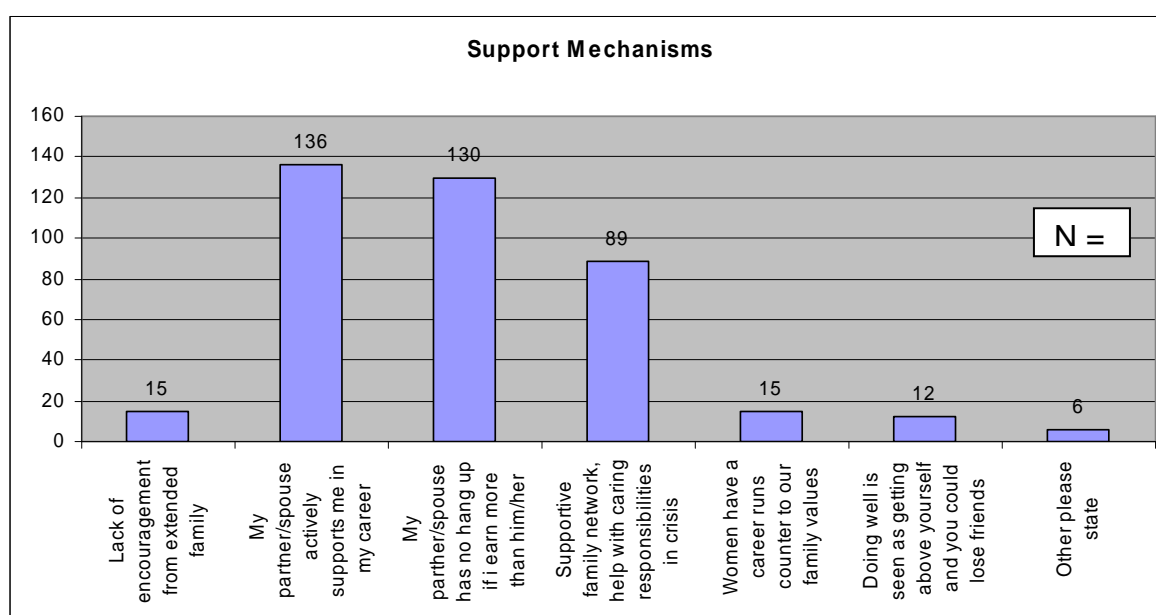
98 [51.3%] of a total of 191 respondents felt that women have to work harder to prove themselves in councils. However only 8 [15.6%] out of the 51 male respondents agreed with that statement.

Additionally, 80 [41.8%] of total respondents felt that the expectation of long hours would conflict with their work-life balance. 61 [43.5%] respondents believed that male managers felt more comfortable working with other men instead of women. However only 8 [15.6%] out of the 51 male respondents agreed with that statement. This section particularly highlighted the different views of male and female respondents.

## Support mechanisms

Research has indicated that the values and expectations of families and the wider community influence women’s decision-making especially in regards to working outside the home. A specific section in the questionnaire issued to senior employees aimed to explore the extent to which this affects senior female local government officers. This is shown in diagram 12 below:

Diagram 12 **Support Mechanisms**



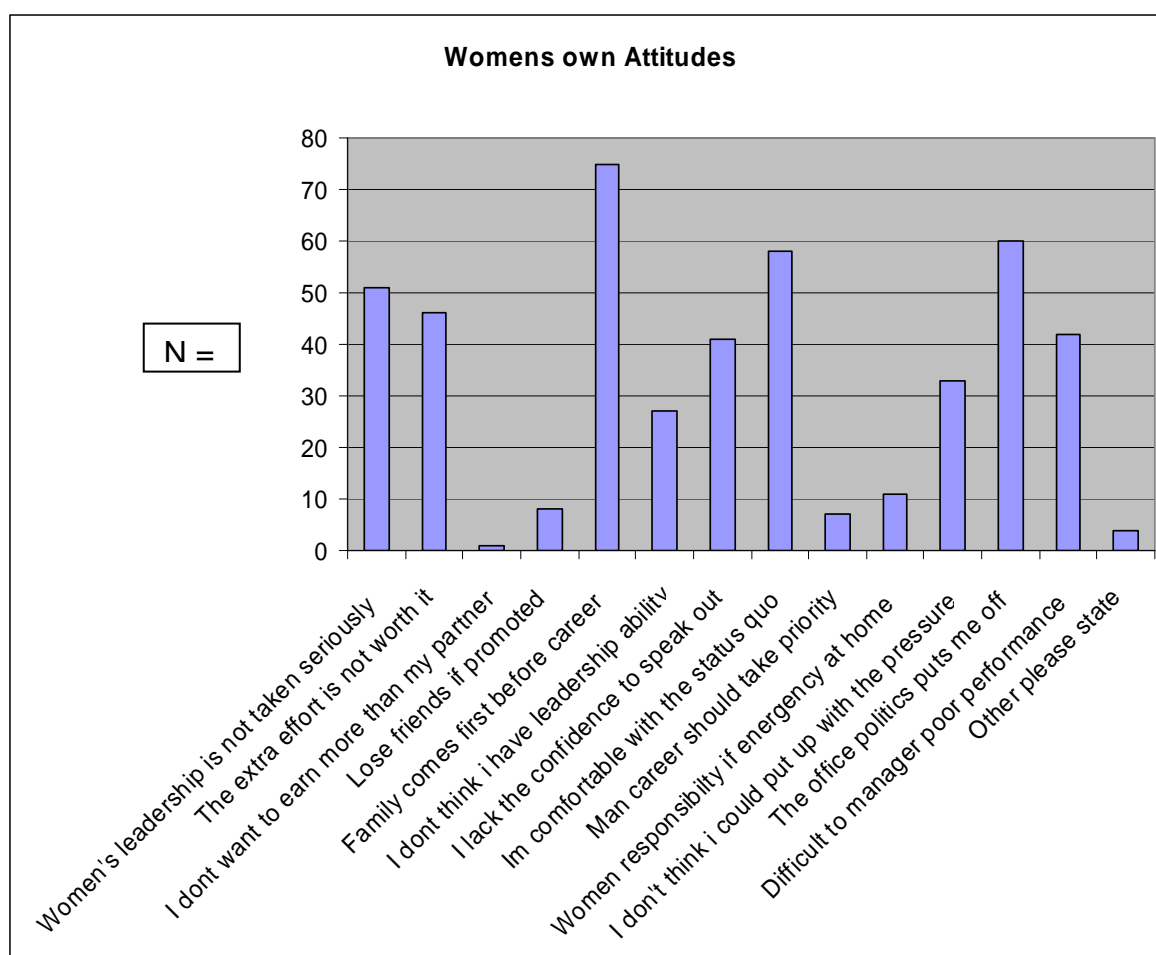
On the whole, positive results were returned with 136 [71.2%] respondents believing that their partner / spouse actively supported them in their career, and 130 [68%] indicating that they felt that their partner / spouse would have no issues if they were the “breadwinner” in financial terms. Both men and women’s views were similar in this area. However the questions did not ask whether domestic duties at home were shared equally between partners, which may have shown different results.

## Women's own attitudes

Research has shown that a potential barrier to career progression may exist in women's own view of themselves and their attitude to work. This section aims to test barriers surrounding women's own attitudes.

51 [26.7%] respondents felt that women's leadership is not taken seriously by other women within the council. 48 [25.1%] also felt that the extra effort required to work at a higher level is not worth it. This is illustrated in diagram 13 below:

Diagram 13 **Difference between female and male attitudes**



The responses received from women indicated that only 9 [17.6%] out the 51 male respondents felt that women's leadership is not taken seriously within

the councils. Furthermore, only 4 [7.8%] male respondents felt that women lacked the confidence to speak out. The literature review also indicated that women's lack of confidence is one of the main inhibiting factors in women's career development. Interestingly only 4 [7.8%] out of 51 males felt that females do not have leadership ability. Therefore women within the councils have different perceptions of how they are viewed compared to their male counterparts.

Additionally, 60 [31.4%] respondents agreed that office politics would deter them from progressing to a higher level and 42 [21.9%] felt that they would find it difficult to manage poor performance and discipline people.

### **Telephone Interviews**

Having gained an overview of employee views and opinions of the main barriers to women's progression within the 26 district councils through the questionnaires, it was felt that, given the sensitive and evocative nature of this research, a number of interesting issues that had been uncovered merited further investigation using in-depth qualitative interviews.

Given the busy schedule of the senior employees within the 26 district councils who had already been asked to participate in conducting the postal questionnaires it was felt that telephone interviews would be the most appropriate method. However it was recognised as argued by Velde (2004) that difficulty surrounding telephone interviews is that the interviewer can not observe the respondents while answering the questions.

10 male and 10 female senior employees (selected by quota sampling) across the 26 district councils were interviewed via telephone. The following structured questions were used.

1. Why do fewer women (on the whole) progress to senior management positions within local government in Northern Ireland?

To improve this situation:

2. What external factors could enhance women's promotional prospects? E.g. structured career / development plans
3. What internal factors could enhance women's promotional prospects? E.g. confidence, etc
4. Do you get the opportunity for job rotation in order to learn multidisciplinary roles your council?
5. Do you think it takes women longer to move into senior positions? If so why?
6. What impact will the Review of Public Administration have on women's positions in councils?
7. Have you any other comments that you wish to add, relating to women's barriers to progression with the 26 district councils?

### **Case Studies - Telephone Interviews**

The following constitutes the primary findings that arose as a result of the telephone interviews. Transcripts of the telephone interviews are enclosed in Appendix 8.

Males who were asked why fewer women in general progress to senior management positions within NI councils assumed this was because they did not want to progress, were not capable, did not have the necessary experience or that they were held back due to home commitments.

The male interviewees also emphasised the lack of promotional opportunities within councils in the past few years and that the council chamber was a male-dominated arena which meant that a limited number of females broke the so-called "*glass ceiling*".

Female interviewees felt that some traditional factors affected female progression e.g. men have held most of the more senior posts in councils since 1972, and some interviewees expected that this would continue. Arguably, some women may not feel investing that time in applying for senior posts particularly as many women joined councils in the past to undertake

clerical and administration roles which do not always naturally lead to progression into senior positions.

Moreover, the females interviewed held the belief that outside work commitments means it is more difficult to focus on career opportunities which may arise, or to undertake further study which may assist in attaining senior positions. Childcare and family responsibilities were highlighted as factors which preventing movement into more senior posts that require more responsibility or evening meetings and committee work, which is an essential part of senior positions in councils. It was also acknowledged that women do not expect flexibility to be facilitated in senior roles and those who did not have caring responsibilities access these roles without facing barriers.

Both males and females interviewed stated that networking and mentoring were underrated by females in local government despite the assertion that they helped to make useful contacts likely to enhance women's promotional prospects. All interviewees were of the opinion that the use of effective in-house training like job shadowing, job rotation and progressive child care schemes would help both males' and females' promotional opportunities.

Additionally respondents held the belief that performance management – Personal Development Plan's (PDPs) would help focus females' individual outputs for both personal and organisational benefit. These would assist step-by-step career planning for all staff on their local government career goals.

Females also felt that councils should begin to *"think outside the box"* and be more creative around options to overcome barriers such as the low uptake of family friendly policies. For instance, one council in Northern Ireland has introduced a four-day week this enables female employees to work full-time but undertake all their contracted hours in four days, and avail of greater work/life balance especially when they have caring responsibilities.

There was general agreement among interviewees that women should begin focussing on their aims and aspirations for the future in order to gain key competencies especially in the light of the Review of Public Administration.

They should have the confidence to apply for a position even when they felt that others had more experience, in order to develop a competency skill base to resist being pigeonholed into one particular area within local government.

Respondents also asserted that females should push the organisation to meet their requirements, as they should have the opportunity to manage a senior position in council and their family commitments rather than sacrificing one for the other.

Interviewees agreed that councils rarely utilise job rotation schemes; however some encourage secondments and offer opportunities for acting up, but normally within the same department and rarely across different functions. However it should be recognised that such arrangements can be very difficult to arrange in smaller councils where costs must also be taken into consideration.

Most of the male interviewees felt that it took females longer to progress because of choice, lack of confidence and family responsibilities. Alternatively female interviewees generally felt that women do not take longer to move into senior positions if they have no caring responsibilities. We can derive from this that family commitments are seen by women as potential barriers to progression. Others women felt that some females lack confidence in their own ability, and are not able to sell themselves as well as their male counterparts.

Interviewees had conflicting views regarding the Review of Public Administration: some saw this as an opportunity for both male and female staff wishing to progress within the new council structures. It was thought that opportunities would arise for those in supporting roles as centralisation will bring potential redundancies and movement into new positions, while at the same time making local government a more desirable place to work. Many felt that the new councils may have more progressive decision-making

processes which would have a positive impact on women's career progression.

In contrast, other interviewees felt that women could be disadvantaged as a minority, e.g. 1 woman competing against 7 male employees for a senior post, which could mean that the gender balance in the new council structures could be worse than at present as a result of the implementation of the Review of Public Administration. Therefore it was felt that it was vital that the correct policies and procedures are introduced to ensure a gender balance in senior positions within the new council model.

## Research conclusions

The questionnaire and interviews undertaken into the potential barriers to progression for women to senior positions within the 26 councils highlighted many positive aspects of local government employment such as supportive supervisors and senior managers, high levels of job interest among women and recognition of the value of women's contribution.

The research also identified a significant shift from indications in previous research, in highlighting more positive female role models, positive levels of support mechanisms for women and significant findings that staff are well informed about policies and practices within the councils. An increase in the number of positive role models for females will help change the current male dominant culture within the 26 district councils.

Nevertheless, despite staff awareness of policies available to employees there remains a strong feeling from female employees that these policies could disadvantage their career in the long-term and that they do not apply in practice to senior and management levels. Additionally a significant number of respondents did not get job feedback on performance which may result in women lacking a realistic sense of their current and potential job performance ability on which to base career expectations.

The research has indicated that Northern Ireland does not mirror the rest of the UK in relation to barriers to women's progression, as interviewees felt that within the 26 district councils there is a limited amount of promotional opportunities available compared to other areas. This may also indicate why there are fewer female employees in senior roles within the 26 district council, compared to Britain.

Female respondents on the whole did not believe that mentoring was important for progression to senior management posts in local government. Crucially these views are at odds with research findings which have shown that in other regions individuals who are mentored are more frequently

promoted, have more career mobility, and advance faster. It could be that there is a lack of awareness regarding the effectiveness of mentoring.

This project has highlighted that childcare and family responsibilities act as a barrier to women wishing to ascend into senior positions within the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland as these roles require greater responsibility, evening meetings and committee work, which are an essential part of these positions. The historical male dominated culture within councils means that female employees do not expect work/life balance flexibility to be facilitated within senior roles, and do not understand how these policies could work other than at junior level. Therefore councils need to ensure and encourage flexible working arrangements to be taken up by both female and male senior employees as these will only be mediated by individual attitudes and by corporate culture.

Further research is required to investigate whether the essential criteria and selection process for Chief Executive's positions within the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland is more favourable to male employees. This research should include an analysis of the district councils (clerks qualifications) determination 1997.

The following recommendations are put forward to help overcome the barriers to women's progression within the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland and the new council structure following the implementation of the Review of Public Administration in 2009.

## **Recommendations - Individuals**

### Personal development

Women should seek feedback on performance and to learn new skills and competencies across different functions within their council especially in the light of the Review of Public Administration.

### Exploit opportunities

Female staff should apply for posts even when they feel that rival applicants are better qualified, even if merely to benefit from interview experience.

### Ask for more

Women should push their councils and elected members to help them to balance their work-life requirements, as they should have the opportunity to hold both a senior position in local government and meet their family commitments simultaneously.

## **Recommendations for Councils**

### Develop creative flexible working arrangements

Councils should develop more creative options to overcome barriers such as the low uptake in family-friendly policies at senior levels. These policies within the councils should be made available to employees at all levels, and to men as well as women in order that men in current senior posts might act as examples to inspire female colleagues. These should be designed to enable both men and women to care for their children or for elderly, sick or disabled relatives or partners, to help them balance work and family life.

### Working arrangements

Councils should explore the use of IT to enable managers to work from home more frequently, and examine whether more managerial jobs could be made

available on a part-time or job share basis. The council should also challenge any assumption that taking a career break or working part-time demonstrates a lesser commitment to the organisation or is incompatible with a managerial position.

#### Review council meeting structures / culture

Councils should review their current meeting culture in order to discourage “*after hours*” meetings which have a negative impact on women who wish to progress into senior positions within the 26 district councils. The after hours meeting structure may also be a barrier for women who wish to stand at the local government elections.

#### Develop mentoring schemes

Councils should develop in-house mentoring schemes for women in junior and senior management. Mentoring schemes will help with personal career development, provide encouragement and support and enable women to get someone else’s view on their performance. Council chief executives should actively encourage women and men who hold senior managerial positions to offer informal support as mentors to their female, as well as their male, junior colleagues.

#### Job rotation

Councils should introduce job rotations so that all staff can become multi-disciplined in order to develop key competencies and gain cross-functional experience within local government to help all staff when promotion opportunities arise. This would have with beneficial consequences of increasing the organisations general effectiveness.

#### Career counselling

Councils should introduce career counselling for all staff to help focus females' individual outputs both for the benefit of the organisation and their own development, alongside proactive career planning.

### Section 75

Councils should refer to Section 75 statutory duty to promote equal opportunities and identity opportunity to better promote the gender balance in the current and new council model.

## **Recommendations for the Local Government Taskforce Implementation Team**

### Local Government Taskforce

The Local Government Taskforce's Implementation Team on Human Resources should ensure that the correct policies are put in place to facilitate a gender balance in local government post 2009 and that more females occupy senior management positions following the Review of Public Administration.

## **Recommendations for SOLACE**

### Membership

SOLACE (Society for Local Government Chief Executives) should extend its membership to include senior management, akin to the policies of its counterpart organisations in England, Scotland and Wales. This would mean senior managers in Northern Ireland would reap benefits from membership of the professional organisation, such as best practice and networking opportunities.

## **Recommendations for Equality Commission**

### Altering attitudes

The Equality Commission should develop programmes and promotional activities to ensure that society's attitudes are changed as currently it is culturally more acceptable for men to work longer hours as women are still seen as primarily responsible for childcare and domestic duties. The community should ensure that both male and female employees can effectively balance work and family life, and not assume that male careers take precedence over those of their female partners, or that men should not have the opportunity to spend equal time with their children.

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