

**Young Women Moving into Politics and Public Life
Newtownabbey Borough Council – Wednesday 5 December 2007**

Contributor Biographies

Opening Plenary Session

Alderman Nigel Hamilton, Mayor of Newtownabbey

Alderman Nigel Hamilton was first elected to Newtownabbey Borough Council in a by-election in May 2001 and elected Mayor in June 2007. He has been Chair of the Development Committee, District Policing Partnership in its inaugural year, Local Strategy Partnership and strategic tier of the Community Safety Partnership. As a Board member for the Comet Interreg Partnership Board and LSP Working Group Vice-Chair, he has a solid grasp of Peace 3 issues and Interreg funding programmes. He has a keen interest in community development and planning and some 12 years experience in international haulage.

Minister Arlene Foster MLA, Minister for the Environment

Minister Arlene Foster is a Member of the Assembly for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, first elected in November 2003 and re-elected in March 2007. She was appointed Minister for the Environment in May 2007 and is responsible for local government. A lawyer by profession she has been in private practice as a solicitor since 1996. Prior to appointment as Minister she was her party's spokesperson for human rights, equality, children and young people's issues. She was a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board from April 2006 to May 2007.

Councillor Naomi Long MLA & Councillor Belfast City Council

Councillor Naomi Long is Deputy Leader of the Alliance Party. She represents East Belfast in the Assembly where she is Deputy Chair of the committee scrutinising the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister. A civil engineer by profession, Naomi was first elected to Belfast City Council in 2001 and sits on the Town Planning Committee. She has been party spokesperson on regional development and education and was Chair of East Belfast sub-group of the District Policing Partnership in 2004/05. Her interests span the built environment, road safety, integrated education, nursery schools, and opposing sectarianism, racism and hate crimes.

Debbie Francey, Youth Project Coordinator, Women into Politics

Debbie Francey's role involves running the Politics 4 Youth programmes and events, managing the website and working with community, voluntary and political groups to engage young women in politics and public life. She is a Board member of WomensTEC which provides training for women in non-traditional areas of employment and sits on the Board of its social economy business. Debbie was the Northern Ireland Co-ordinator for the UK Youth Parliament until recently. She completed the Young Political Leaders programme in Boston in 2007. Debbie is also a volunteer mentor.

Panel 1 – Political Young Women

Paula Bradshaw – Ulster Unionist Party

Paula Bradshaw is a member of the Ulster Unionist Party. She has been in the UUP since 2004 and is the Spokesperson on Urban Regeneration. At constituency level, she is the Secretary of East Antrim Association Management Committee. Paula represents the UUP on the Bill of Rights Forum and its associated Women's Working Group and Outreach Workers Working Group. Paula is an Independent Member of the Newtownabbey District Policing Partnership, and through this she is the Chairman of the University Sector Policing & Community Forum. She is a Committee Member of the Newtownabbey Shadow Youth Council.

Catherine Curran – Alliance Party

Catherine Curran is Constituency Officer for South Belfast MLA Anna Lo. She studied Politics and Cultural Media Studies at Queen's University and gained further qualifications in Political Skills and Northern Irish Politics. She worked for Queen's University, NIPPA (now Early Years), the Community Relations Council and the Indian Community Centre where she encouraged female participation in public life. With a keen interest in diversity and equality issues and women in politics, Claire has worked with Women into Politics and Women's News and is a member of the South Belfast Roundtable on Racism.

Claire Hanna – Social Democratic & Labour Party

Claire Hanna is the International Secretary of the SDLP. She has been active in the SDLP since 1997 and is a former Chair of SDLP Youth. Claire sits on the SDLP Executive and is Vice-Chair of its largest branch. Claire is employed by development agency Concern Worldwide as its Campaigns and Communications Officer. She worked previously with the BBC and Comic Relief. Claire has worked as a facilitator locally and in Israel, Palestine and Eastern Europe. She is an active trade unionist.

Shakheera Lee Wright – Democratic Unionist Party

Shakheera Lee Wright graduated from the University of Ulster in 2006 with first class honours in BSc (Hons) Marketing. She began working for the DUP in January 2007, first on the 2007 Assembly election campaign, organising events and handling press. She currently works in the DUP Press and Policy Unit where she focuses on research and communications. She takes particular interest in enhancing internal communications and is designing and producing a monthly newsletter for DUP representatives and members.

Cara McShane – Sinn Féin

Councillor Cara McShane is 26 years old and from Ballintoy in North Antrim. She studied Law and Politics at the University of Ulster. Cara was interested in politics from a young age and worked in a Sinn Féin Advice Centre for work experience when she was in secondary school. In 2005 she was elected to represent Sinn Féin on Moyle District Council. She represents Moyle on the Housing Council for the Six Counties. For the past year Cara has worked as Sinn Féin's Administrator in the Assembly.

Panel 2 – Political Institutions and Public Affairs

Helen Hall, Learning & Development Manager, Newtownabbey Borough Council

Helen Hall, Learning and Development Manager with Newtownabbey Borough Council, has worked with the Council since 1999. Previously she spent a number of years working in the manufacturing and retail sectors. Within the Council Helen manages a portfolio of projects in conjunction with the various Council departments. She participates in and advises on organisational development and performance management issues within the Council. Helen sits on the Board of the UK Strategic Skills Partnership and is the Strategic Partnership Advisor for Northern Ireland.

Ashley McIlwrath, Training & Development Manager, Northern Ireland Assembly

Ashley McIlwrath became Training & Development Manager in the Assembly in November 2005. She identifies, develops and delivers training to meet the Assembly's business needs and enhance service provision. She joined the Civil Service in 1984 and has had a very varied career, having been employed in many departments including Department of Environment, Department for Social Development and Department of Finance and Personnel. While her early career was mainly in operational teams, she has been involved in training and development for the past 12 years.

Gráinne Magee, Consultant, Stratagem

Gráinne Magee graduated from Queen's University in 2001 with a BA Joint Honours in Politics and Sociology and holds a Masters in Political Communication and Public Affairs from the University of Ulster. She has worked with Stratagem since 2004, first as Research and Information Officer and then as a Consultant. Gráinne provides organizations with project management support through complex legislative and regulatory environments, coordinating policy development, lobbying and public relations activities. She delivers training in understanding government, lobbying, campaigning and stakeholder management to a range of bodies.

Panel 3 – Newtownabbey Women Councillors

Councillor Lynn Frazer – Alliance Party

Alderman Lynn Frazer was first elected to Newtownabbey Council in a by-election in 1991. She was Deputy Mayor 2005/06 and Mayor in 2006/07. With interests in the environment, education and youth, she has served on all Council committees, most recently Development and Environment. She is a member of the North Eastern Education and Library Board, as well as Newtownabbey Local Strategy Partnership. Employed as Constituency Manager for David Ford MLA, she works in his constituency office in Glengormley and the Alliance office at Parliament Buildings.

Councillor Etta Mann – Democratic Unionist Party

Councillor Etta Mann was first elected to Newtownabbey Council in 2005. Her interest is in the environment and services for older people. Prior to becoming a Councillor she worked for 30 years with Social Services in Day Centres for older people. She has been a campaigner and lobbyist on Carnmoney Hill Country Park and Whiteabbey Hospital for many years. She sits on all Council committees and a number management groups such as Ballyclare Community Concerns, Newtownabbey Town Centre Management, Ballyclare Mayfair and the Newtownabbey Women's Forum.

Councillor Noreen McClelland – Social Democratic & Labour Party

Councillor Noreen McClelland was first elected to Newtownabbey Council in 2001. She is Chair of the Economic Development & Tourism Sub-Committee and a member of the Audit and Good Relations Committees. Interested in community and health matters and voluntary organisations she sits on the Local Strategy Partnership, chairs the strategic tier of the Community Safety Partnership and is vice-chair of the Shadow Youth Council Management Committee. She serves on the management boards of Mallusk Enterprise Park and Women's Aid, and works part-time as manager of an orthopaedic practice.

Councillor Vera McWilliams – Ulster Unionist Party

Councillor Vera McWilliams has been a member of Newtownabbey Council since 1997. She became the first woman Mayor in 2001, a post she held for two terms. With a background in both farming and the manufacturing sector, her interests are in economic development, education and the countryside. She sits on all Council committees. She is Chair of the International Committee, the Town Centre Management Board and REAP as well as the UUP South Antrim Constituency Association. She is a member of the Ulster Unionist Executive Committee.

Closing Plenary Session

Bronagh Cappa, Shadow Youth Council Officer, Newtownabbey Borough Council

Bronagh Cappa was appointed Shadow Youth Council Officer with Newtownabbey Borough Council in 2006. In this role she is responsible for the day to day management of the Shadow Youth Council and supports the development of the skills and capacity of the 25 elected youth representatives. Bronagh organises meetings and develops work plans for the Shadow Councillors and communicates the successes of the Shadow Youth Council to young people in the Borough.

Minister Caitríona Ruane MLA, Minister for Education

Minister Caitríona Ruane was first elected to represent North Down in the Assembly in 2003. Until appointed as Minister she was her party's spokesperson on equality and human rights. Previously a full-time professional tennis player, she was 1981 Irish Times Tennis player of the Year. She turned to human rights and development work in 1983 working in El Salvador, Nicaragua, for Trócaire in Dublin and then in Belfast. She was Director of the West Belfast Féile an Phobail for several years before chairing the campaign on the Columbia 3.

Norman Dunn, Chief Executive of Newtownabbey Borough Council

Norman Dunn, was appointed as Chief Executive of Newtownabbey Borough Council in September 1996 and has completed 48 years service with the Council. Norman has an exceptional career to date. As Chief Executive his transformational leadership style has made root and branch changes both in structure and culture. Norman is a member of many professional bodies including the local government chief executive's body SOLACE.

Facilitator and Chair

Bronagh Hinds, Senior Fellow, Institute of Governance, Queen's University

Bronagh Hinds came to Queen's University after holding director positions in a people's college, Oxfam in NI and one parent family organisation Gingerbread. She was Deputy Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission 1999/03. She founded DemocraShe in 2000 to prepare women for political campaigning and leadership and contributes to Women in Local Councils and local government reform and modernization generally. She is a Commissioner on the Women's National Commission and the Local Government Staff Commission and sits on the Boards of a peace centre and a youth organization.