



## A Call to Female Leaders in Scottish Local Government

Jane O'Donnell - COSLA Chief Executive

Shona Morrison - COSLA President

Dear Colleagues,

To mark International Women's Day 2025, we take the slightly unusual approach of writing to all female leaders at both the political and officer levels. COSLA, as the voice of Scottish Local Government, wish to reaffirm our dedication to a Local Government in Scotland where women have equal access to power and resources, enabling them to thrive in public service and democratic leadership.

Women in leadership positions within local government are essential to ensuring that women and girls in the community have fair access to resources and the autonomy needed for healthy lives. Women's political representation is crucial for delivering thriving communities, as their experiences and needs often differ significantly from those of men. Women are more likely to rely on local public services and bear the primary responsibility for unpaid care of children, adolescents, and elderly relatives. They are also more engaged in family-related activities within their communities.

Additionally, women impacted by intersecting inequalities face unique and compounded disadvantages. Many Black, Asian, and ethnic minority women, as well as pregnant, older, and disabled women, have specific needs that must be addressed. "As the representative voice of local government in Scotland COSLA understands that our current representation does not yet meet the standards to which we strive. In future we seek not to simply accommodate but celebrate these intersections. In doing so we can ensure that those who occupy and work in leadership roles across local government help address unique challenges and promotes equality for all."

Without women in leadership roles at both political and officer level, the services that benefit women are often overlooked, perpetuating inequality, and limiting opportunities for women to lead healthy, empowered lives. By incorporating the views of diverse women, especially at the highest levels, Councils can better tailor and target solutions to those most in need.

At COSLA, we recognise that women experience life differently from men and our policies must address these differences to provide effective support and protection, essential for achieving gender equity in both public and private life. We are determined to lead by example.

At the Barriers to Elected Office Special Interest Group, the election and retention of female elected members has been a key priority. In the last year, COSLA's focus on Councillor Safety, Proxy Voting, and Councillor terms and conditions has been considered through a gendered lens, working to reduce the systemic barriers women face. In 2025, we will continue this work, exploring new areas with an enhanced focus on young women, caring responsibilities, and civility in public life.

In November last year, we announced our commitment to develop a programme of work to address gender inequality through policy design, decision-making, and scrutiny. Our initial focus will be on advancing women's access to resources and power, a prerequisite for women's equality of opportunity and safety. Our strong partnership with the Scottish Government through our co-ownership of the Equally Safe Strategy continues as together we seek to realise its aims and create a Scotland where all people can live equally safe lives.

On International Women's Day (and every other day of the year), we celebrate our female leaders in the Local Government family and the important work you do. We also ask you to collaborate collectively with us to bring your experience, insight, and power to our collective task of encouraging more women and girls into leadership roles within the local government family. As COSLA marks its 50th anniversary, we will ask all leaders of Scotland to be visible and supportive of this call.

In the coming days we will be publishing a request for COSLA to profile you, your achievements, and your words of encouragement to future female leaders in Local Government in Scotland as a key part of our marking of COSLA's 50th Anniversary in the next months.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Shona Morrison  
COSLA President



Jane O'Donnell

COSLA Chief Executive