



The Northern Powerhouse; an analysis of women's representation

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Overview and key findings

The Government's devolution agenda and commitment to creating a Northern Powerhouse has seen significant powers and budgets passed from Whitehall to newly established combined authorities.

This agenda is most developed in the regions which make up the Northern Powerhouse but is part of a national drive which sees areas from Essex to Herefordshire developing proposals to bid for powers previously held centrally. This is a dramatic change in how our country is governed and services delivered. It offers an opportunity to put the Prime Minister's goal of closing the gender pay gap within a generation at the heart of regional approaches to economic growth and service provision¹. However, so far the experience of the Northern Powerhouse suggests this shift risks handing power to male-dominated structures and shutting women out of the decision making process. There are some positive examples of equal representation within the Northern Powerhouse but men continue to dominate the top roles.

As the devolution agenda progresses, we must learn the lessons of this first phase to ensure we embed equal representation and a commitment to gender equality and diversity in the future of our politics.

- ▶ 40% of local councillors in the Northern Powerhouse² region are women, but women make up just 21% of council leaders and directly elected mayors
- ▶ Only 1 of the 7 chairs of the established and proposed combined authorities in the Northern Powerhouse region are women
- ▶ Of 134 senior leadership roles in the Northern Powerhouse 96 (or 72%) of these are occupied by men
- ▶ The City Deals underpinning devolution come with a commitment to regional directly elected mayors – but so far only 4 of the 16 existing directly elected mayors in England and Wales are women³

What is the Northern Powerhouse and why does it matter?

The Northern Powerhouse is the centrepiece of the Government's devolution agenda. Launched by Chancellor George Osborne in 2014⁴ it aims to bring together the local authorities and regions in the north to challenge the economic dominance of London and the South East. Alongside investment in transport infrastructure and the Science, Technology, Engineering and Manufacturing (STEM) industries, the creation of the Northern Powerhouse has been driven by a series of "City Deals" with clusters of local authorities coming together to bid for powers and funding previously held by Whitehall. In Manchester, the first and most wide ranging deal, a raft of powers will be handed to local politicians; from the retention of the tax proceeds of local growth to skills provision⁵. In each case the new powers come with the requirement for a directly elected mayor. In short, the Northern Powerhouse is part of a wider drive to put more money and more power in the hands of local authorities.

1 The gender pay gap for women working full time is currently 13.9%. At the current rate of progress it will take over 50 years to close the gap completely. Fawcett Society (2015) Equal Pay Day Briefing, <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Equal-Pay-Day-Briefing-2015.pdf>

2 For the purposes of this analysis Northern Powerhouse regions are identified as Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Sheffield City Region Combined Authority, North East Combined Authority, Tees Valley Combined Authority and the councils which comprise the Humber LEP. Although Humber is not currently proposing to form a Combined Authority this looks a likely grouping should devolution proceed.

3 Sandford M, (2016) Directly Elected Mayors, Briefing Paper Number 05000, House of Commons Library, 18 May 2016

4 Osborne, G. (2014) We need a northern powerhouse. HM Treasury and Rt Hon. George Osborne MP, 23 June <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-we-need-a-northern-powerhouse> 3 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2012) "Greater Manchester City Deal"

5 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/221014/GreaterManchester-City-Deal-final_0.pdf

Yet as this shift takes place, little attention has been paid so far to the gender and diversity impacts of the change. Women remain underrepresented in local government; as councillors, in political decision-making roles and at the most senior officer level. This has several implications. It means that as decisions about the economic future of the north are made, women will be underrepresented. There is an opportunity to shape the north's resurgence in a way which improves gender equality and diversity, for instance increasing the representation of women from a range of backgrounds in the highest paying apprenticeship opportunities or investing in the childcare infrastructure. Will these issues be on the agenda for the Northern Powerhouse and given due priority?

Increased power over budgets is a real opportunity for local authorities to address inequalities in their regions and create growth that closes gaps between women and men. However, the first step to achieving that is ensuring women are properly represented in local power structures.

The Northern Powerhouse is part of a first phase of devolution to local government, but in areas right across the country, from the boroughs of East London to Cornwall, devolution deals are being developed. As new structures are created and local priorities are set, there is an opportunity to embed commitment to creating gender equality. But without attention and concerted effort there is a real risk that devolution will simply see power passed to structures dominated by men without regard to women's voices.

It's important to note that this forms part of a wider landscape of structural changes, such as the creation of Police Crime Commissioners, Regional Schools Commissioners and the Academies programme, which are realigning the balance of where power is held across a host of policy areas. In some cases this has meant greater centralisation and decreases in local authority power, as well as devolution.

Women's representation in the Northern Powerhouse

Following the local elections in May 2016 the Fawcett Society examined the local authorities that make up the combined authorities forming the Northern Powerhouse: Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, Sheffield City Region, North East Combined Authority, Tees Valley and the authorities that form the Humber Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). We looked at the number of women councillors in each local authority as well as their representation in the most senior roles in the new structures.

These roles are:

- ▶ Chair of the combined authority or LEP

And at the local authority level:

- ▶ Chief executive
- ▶ Leader or directly elected mayor
- ▶ Deputy leader

Women's representation as councillors

- ▶ Across the local authorities considered, women made up 40% of councillors

In this respect they outperform Westminster, where only 29% of MPs are women⁶. This figure is also higher than the 32% of councillors in England who were women prior to May 2016⁷. However, the headline statistic conceals variations between and within the combined authorities themselves

6 Centre for Women and Democracy (2015) "Sex and Power; Who runs Britain? 2015" Counting Women In <http://www.cfdw.org.uk/uploads/Sex%20and%20Power.pdf>

7 Keen, R. (2015) Women in Parliament and Government Briefing Paper Number SN01250, House of Commons Library, 19 June 2015

- ▶ Manchester City Council has the highest proportion of female councillors achieving 50% and gender balance
- ▶ North East Lincolnshire has the lowest proportion of female councillors, with only 27% of their councillors being women

However, when we look at women's representation as councillors across the councils forming each combined authority we see that the groupings that Manchester and North East Lincolnshire belong to both perform poorly: Greater Manchester and Humber Combined Authorities have the poorest representation of female councillors at 36%.

Leaders and directly elected mayors

Despite 4 in 10 councillors being women, the most senior roles in the combined authorities remain dominated by men.

Figure 1: Leaders, mayors and deputy leaders by gender



Chief executives

Representation at the most senior officer level is more balanced. 60% of chief executives of Northern Powerhouse local authorities are men and 40% are women.

However, it is worth noting that women make up 75% of the overall local government workforce.⁸ As such we might expect their representation at the most senior levels to be significantly higher.

Combined authority chairs

Men remain dominant in the new role of combined authority chair.

- ▶ Only 1 of the 7 chairs of the established and proposed combined authorities in the Northern Powerhouse region are women

Women in senior leadership

We combined these positions to consider how local authorities in the combined authorities perform overall on women's representation in the most senior leadership roles.⁹ Across all the combined authorities there are a total of 134 Senior Leadership positions available; these are the leaders, deputy leaders, chief executives and combined authority chairs.

The gender balance at combined authority level is highly varied.

- ▶ Overall 72% of these positions are occupied by men.

⁸ Harvey, J (2012) Employment trends: women in local government, 7th August 2012 <http://www.theguardian.com/local-government-network/statsblog/2012/aug/07/employment-trends-women-local-government>

⁹ Governance arrangements vary across different combined authorities and there are a number of ways in which decision making might be influenced. However we have identified these roles as integral to the initial formation of the Combined Authorities and future decision-making. For the purposes of Humber we have counted the chair of the LEP.

Figure 2: Combined Authority Total Senior Leadership Positions

Combined Authority	Total Senior Leadership Positions	No. male	No. female	% Male	% Female
Humber (LEP)	13	11	2	85	15
Liverpool City Region	18	15	3	83	17
North East	20	15	5	75	25
Greater Manchester	32	24	8	75	25
Tees Valley	16	11	5	69	31
Sheffield City Region	19	13	6	68	32
West Yorkshire	16	7	9	44	56
Total	134	96	38	72	28

West Yorkshire has the highest representation of women in senior leadership roles at 56%. However, this is the only combined authority where women outnumber men. In each of the other combined authorities, men have over half of the senior leadership positions. Humber has the worst performance in terms of senior leadership positions – just 15% of these are held by women.

At the local authority level, we see 15 councils where all the senior leadership positions are occupied by men but only one (Bradford) where they are all occupied by women.

What the Northern Powerhouse will mean for its citizens, council services and the spending of public money is subject to much debate but it is clear that whilst there are some areas of strong performance, women remain underrepresented in positions of power. And this could be set to get worse. Each devolution deal is accompanied with a requirement for a regional directly elected mayor. But only four of the 16 existing directly elected mayors in England and Wales are women.¹⁰

The picture is slightly more balanced in the Northern Powerhouse region, where directly elected mayors can be found in Liverpool City Council; Middlesbrough; North Tyneside; Salford; and Doncaster. Both Doncaster and North Tyneside have female mayors with Ros Jones and Norma Redfearn.¹¹

There are three declared candidates so far for the election of the new Mayor of Greater Manchester. All three are men: Andy Burnham MP, Ivan Lewis MP and interim Greater Manchester Mayor, Tony Lloyd.¹²



Figure 3: Senior leadership roles women vs men

Leaders and directly elected mayors



Deputy leaders



Combined authority chairs



Chief executives



Figure 4: Councils with all male and all female leadership positions



Figure 5: Directly elected mayors by gender



10 Female directly elected mayors are: Ros Jones in Doncaster, Kate Allsop in Mansfield, Norma Redfearn in North Tyneside and Dorothy Thornhill in Watford.

11 Sandford M, (2016) Directly Elected Mayors, Briefing Paper Number 05000, House of Commons Library 18 May 2016

12 Bush, S (2016) Andy Burnham to run for Greater Manchester mayor, New Statesman 18th May 2016, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/devolution/2016/05/andy-burnham-run-greater-manchester-mayor>

Party representation across the northern powerhouse

The Labour Party dominates the politics of the Northern Powerhouse.

- ▶ 36/43 of the councils making up the northern powerhouse are Labour controlled
- ▶ 3/43 (Trafford, East Riding of Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire) are Conservative controlled
- ▶ 4/43 (Stockport, Calderdale, Kirklees, Northumberland and North East Lincolnshire) have no overall control.

The council with the lowest representation of women councillors is North East Lincolnshire which has no overall control. Labour led councils are some of the best and the worst in terms of representation.

Police and Crime Commissioners

The creation of combined authorities and brokering of city deals comes against a backdrop of other shifts in where power is held. These have also seen women underrepresented. For instance, there are 43 Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales. But research from Criminal Justice Alliance shows that only 7 of these are women.¹³

Why does this matter?

As new institutions are formed and local authorities gain greater control over their local economies, the Northern Powerhouse has a unique opportunity to address gender inequality. Devolution in Wales and Scotland in the late 1990s saw unprecedented numbers of women elected to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, resulting in 50:50 representation in Wales in 2003. Within the first two terms of the Welsh Assembly, female AMs were responsible for raising childcare 61.8% of the times it was debated, for raising domestic violence 74.2% of the time, and equal pay 65.4% of the time¹⁴. This resulted in tangible changes in policy: from longer maternity leave for teachers to housing priority for women fleeing domestic violence.¹⁵ The Hansard Society has argued that a number of women MSPs became strong advocates for areas of policy of particular (but not exclusive) interest to women.¹⁶

Just as important as who holds power are the kinds of economies these new regions will create. Much of the funding going to the Northern Powerhouse is ring-fenced for physical infrastructure and investment in science, technology and engineering – vocational areas where women are poorly represented. Where women do undertake vocational training they are much more likely to be in low paid apprenticeships in care or health and beauty than in engineering or construction.¹⁷ There is a £2000 gender pay gap at apprentice level.¹⁸

All this comes against the backdrop of huge cuts to local government funding where public services that women are more likely to rely on, such as social care and women's refuges, have faced dramatic funding cuts. In recent years, devolution has often meant greater responsibilities with a smaller budget. But as more areas step forward to make devolution deals, it is time for combined authorities to be ambitious about the potential they have to create new ways of investing public money and encouraging economic growth to narrow the gaps between women and men. Local government is now tasked to use their business rate base to fund growth. However, it is vital that alongside physical infrastructure such as roads and rail, there is investment in the social infrastructure

13 Criminal Justice Alliance <http://criminaljusticealliance.org/pcc-elections-2016/>

14 Chaney, P., MacKay, F. and MacAllister, L. (2007) *Women, politics and constitutional change: the first years of the National Assembly for Wales*, Cardiff University Press (quoted in McMillan, J. and Fox, R. (2010) *Has Devolution Delivered for Women?* Hansard Society)

15 *ibid*

16 McMillan, J. and Fox, R. (2010) *Has Devolution Delivered for Women?* Hansard Society

17 Fawcett Society (2015) *Equal Pay Day Briefing: The Gender Pay Gap- Facts, Causes and Solutions* <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Equal-Pay-Day-Briefing-2015.pdf>

18 Young Women's Trust (2015) *Apprenticeships – Where the Pay Gap First Appears*, http://www.youngwomenstrust.org/what_we_do/media_centre/press_releases/319_apprenticeships_where_pay_gap_first_appears<http://bit.ly/1kylCBW>

that allows women to fully participate in paid work such as social care and childcare. There is an opportunity too for combined authorities to incentivise and support the creation of quality part-time and flexible jobs, enabling more women and men to meet caring responsibilities outside of the paid workplace.

So far many of the deals have been struck behind closed doors. Fawcett also raises the importance of greater local engagement in this process going forward, in particular ensuring the voices, needs and priorities of local women are reflected in the bidding process.

Devolution offers a one off opportunity to embed gender equality and women's representation in our politics. Only by actively addressing this issue and ensuring that we don't simply recreate old inequalities can we make the most of the incredible pool of talent found in the women of the Northern Powerhouse and nationwide.

What happens next?

The Fawcett Society, in partnership with the LGiU, is launching a year-long Commission, jointly chaired by Labour's Dame Margaret Hodge MP and Conservative councillor Cllr Gillian Keegan, Director of Women2Win. The Commission will assess whether local government is working for women. Funded by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, the Commission will adopt a strategic approach and focus on the newly created structures emerging from the devolution agenda and how they are including or excluding women. It will also gather evidence over the next 12 months on:

- ▶ women's representation at a local level, and in particular focus on women in positions of power and leadership and where women make a positive difference
- ▶ the barriers to women's participation and representation and the practical solutions which would enable more women to participate
- ▶ the diversity of women's representation including BAME women, disabled women, those with caring responsibilities and different age groups

Stay up to date with the local government commission through our social media channels, our website or e-newsletter. For more information <http://bit.ly/FawcettLocalGovt>

