

## **Engender Parliamentary Briefing: The 10th Anniversary of the Death of Jo Cox**

**15<sup>th</sup> June 2026**

### **BACKGROUND**

Engender is a leading feminist policy and advocacy organisation working to secure women's social, political and economic equality and realise women's rights in Scotland. We aim to make visible the impact of structural inequalities on women and wider society, and work at Scottish, UK and international levels to produce research, analysis and recommendations for intersectional feminist legislation and policy.

Ahead of the Member's Business debate marking [The 10th Anniversary of the Death of Jo Cox](#), we want to share our expertise on the topic of equal and safe participation in politics. This is an issue Engender has worked on extensively through our Equal Representation project, including with our partners in the [Equal Representation Coalition](#). From this work, we know that **women and other underrepresented groups in politics are disproportionately affected by a lack of safety and security**, which has wider repercussions on democracy that affect us all.

### **SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS**

As such, we wish to bring the following to your attention:

1. **The current political environment is hostile to women and forces many to resign from politics**, as seen at this year's Holyrood elections, with a record number (40%) of women MSPs standing down. [Engender's own research](#) shows that misogynistic abuse, including social media abuse, and threats to safety were among the top reasons cited by women MSPs standing down at the 2026 parliamentary election.
2. Our forthcoming research launching on Wednesday (17<sup>th</sup> June) on [violence against women in councils reveals that nine in ten women councillors in Scotland we surveyed have experienced sexism, misogyny or gender-based violence during their career](#). Almost all (98%) had experienced microaggressions — everyday sexist slights, snubs and insults. Violence against women exists in a continuum with more overt forms, such as physical violence, usually preceded by these more subtle ones. **When incidents of everyday sexism in politics are dismissed, it creates the**

**conditions for more extreme forms of violence to occur**, showing the importance of tackling all forms of this violence.

3. **Violence against women in politics also directly undermines women's participation in local democracy**, with half (48%) of women councillors in this research saying their experiences had caused them to become less vocal and a fifth saying they had been excluded from decision-making.
4. Finally, [our research on women's political journey](#) shows that **sexist bullying is a persistent problem within some branches and local parties for women standing for election, with disabled and minoritised women at an increased risk**. These experiences can cause women to question their positions and political futures.

#### **Engender is calling on the Scottish Government to:**

- Promote a zero-tolerance approach on sexist language, with clear disciplinary consequences to support enforcement.
- Ensure there is a comprehensive Code of Conduct and bespoke policies for all members that prohibit bullying, gender-based violence and discrimination, and set out clear and transparent reporting processes.
- At all levels, foster a culture that takes proactive steps against sexism, racism, classism, ableism, transphobia and other intersecting discrimination.
- Have clear policies in place to address internal bullying and harassment. Ensure all members know how to access these.
- Address sexism and other forms of discrimination, bullying, harassment and abuse through robust institutional policies and reporting processes within elected institutions.

#### **We also urge all MSPs to:**

- Consider the [Gender-Sensitive Audit's findings](#) and Engender's recommendations on the topic as found in our reports and work of the [Equal Representation Coalition](#).

#### **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

Contact: Noomi Anyanwu, Equal Representation Development Officer, Engender

Email: [noomi.anyanwu@engender.org.uk](mailto:noomi.anyanwu@engender.org.uk)

#### **ABOUT US**

Engender is Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation, working to dismantle structural sexism to increase women's social, political and economic equality, and enable women's rights. We believe in intersectional, inclusive feminism, and work at Scottish, UK and international level to produce research, analysis, and recommendations for intersectional feminist legislation and programmes.