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The Rt Hon Anneliese Dodds MP
Minister of State for Women and Equalities
Women and Equalities Unit
Correspondence Team, Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS
3rd December 2024

Dear Minister,

On behalf of Engender, we congratulate you on your appointment as Minister of State for Women and Equalities. Engender is Scotland's national policy and advocacy organisation. We have been working for 30 years to secure women's social, political, and economic equality and realise women's rights in Scotland.

Women's ongoing underrepresentation in our political institutions, from parliaments to council chambers, creates a significant democratic deficit. Communities are missing out on women's expertise in decision-making despite overwhelming evidence demonstrating the positive impacts of women's political leadership.

We were particularly heartened that the 2024 General Election has returned the most diverse Westminster parliament in history with women now making up 40% of UK MPs. We are also encouraged by the improvement in ethnic minority representation. This is testimony to decades of work by equality advocates in political parties and civil society.

We know from experience in Scotland that progress is often non-linear and inconsistent. Following the 2003 Scottish Parliament elections, women totalled over 39% of MSPs. However, this figure fell to just 32% at the next election in 2007. It took until 2021 for women's representation to surpass 45%. We want to work with you to ensure that the historic gains at Westminster at this election do not follow an equally circuitous path to progress.

Engender is Scotland's feminist organisation. We work for women's economic, political, and social equality with men. Engender is a Scottish charity (SC029053) and a company limited by guarantee (SC 286639).





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A major challenge that we face in mapping the causes and formulating solutions to the chronic underrepresentation of women, racialised communities, LGBTI people and disabled people, is the major gap in data regarding the protected characteristics of our representatives.

Compelling political parties to disclose candidate diversity data is crucial to holding them accountable. This is why enacting Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 must be a top priority for the Government. We know that you share this view, and we were delighted to see you affirm the Government's commitment to enacting 106 in September this year¹.

In Scotland, two crucial elections are approaching, the Scottish Parliament elections in 2026 and the Local Authority elections in 2027. The 2021 Holyrood election resulted in the most diverse Scottish Parliament in history. Despite these positive results, there can be no room for complacency.

At the local level, the picture is less optimistic with just 35% of local councillors in Scotland being women. At the current rate of change, gender parity in Scotland's councils will not be achieved until at least 2037.

Despite being the tier of government where action is needed most, Section 106 as currently drafted would not apply to local authority elections in its current form if enacted. Yet, it is one of the best tools available to promote transparency and ensure that political parties play their part in creating a more equal society across the UK. We would therefore ask that you work to extend its criteria to include local authority elections.

With this in mind, we would be grateful for any clarity you can provide on the following points:

- Can you provide any indication of a timeframe for when Section 106 will be enacted? Specifically, will it be enacted in time for the upcoming elections in Scotland in 2026 and 2027?
- Can you confirm whether Section 106 will be extended to include elections to local authorities?

We are grateful for any update you can provide and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

¹ Dodds, Anneliese; Labour List; September 2024 <https://labourlist.org/2024/09/labour-conference-2024-anneliese-dodds-general-election-women-labour-mps/>





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Catherine Murphy

**Executive Director,
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