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# Genuinely representing the Tees Valley

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Seizing the  
opportunity to write  
equality into the  
Constitution of the  
Tees Valley  
Combined Authority

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A Scrutiny Study Conducted by  
the Tees Valley Combined  
Authority Overview & Scrutiny  
Committee – August 2018-  
January 2019

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## 1. Chair's Executive Summary

**Women and minorities have historically been under-represented in public life. Whilst devolution deals offer a new way forward for public services, they have so far done nothing to make public bodies more representative of the communities they serve.**

In June of 2018 the Cabinet of the Tees Valley Combined Authority requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee carry out an in-depth scrutiny study into the diversity of its membership, struck by how appointments to its statutory and non-statutory committees were extraordinarily male-dominated and undeniably unrepresentative of our region's population.

Over the past year a working group of three councillors, supported by two officers, has taken evidence from the Mayor of the Tees Valley, the Leaders and Mayor of its constituent authorities, the Chair of the Local Enterprise Partnership, the Chief Executives and Managing Director of its constituent authorities, a survey of 78 local councillors and 7 individual members of the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Regional Secretary of the Trades Union Congress. The working group has also examined relevant academic research and studied best practice from other Combined and Local Authorities.

Amid all this research, one particular quote stands out.

*"This is overdue. This is an issue I have flagged up again and again. Just look at the pictures of the signing of the devolution deal... it's all grumpy old men! You still see that in meetings and you still see it too often. From Tees Valley Unlimited to the LEP to the Shadow Combined Authority we've never been representative of our communities and we need to be"*

The key findings of this study are as follows:

- **There is an overwhelming and unanimous desire for both the Tees Valley Combined Authority and the five Tees Valley Councils to have memberships which more closely represent the communities they serve– but that at this moment this is not close to being achieved. In gender especially, the Authority and its constituent authorities remain significantly unrepresentative - and this will not be addressed without action.**
- **Although women make up an above average percentage of the total number of Tees Valley councillors, they appear not to be progressing into leadership roles – with councillors surveyed citing a lack of confidence and a perceived lack of knowledge.**

- **There exists a lack of engagement with and understanding of the Tees Valley Combined Authority's purpose and ambitions within the region, which even extends to councillors.**

Paragraph 2.6 of the Constitution of the Tees Valley Combined Authority states that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee itself must make "specific efforts to engage with those groups who would otherwise be excluded".

We have to acknowledge as a Committee that our membership is not achieving that goal, and it is debatable how well the Tees Valley Combined Authority as whole is currently delivering on it.

Whilst recognising that the ability of the Tees Valley Combined Authority to take unilateral action to address an unbalanced elected membership coming forward from its constituent councils is highly limited, its ability to show leadership in this area is unmatched.

The Combined Authority has already taken measures to improve diversity of its Associate Cabinet Membership level through aiming to achieve a 50/50 gender balance of the Local Enterprise Board by 2020 and proactively recruiting three new female members. But more needs to be done.

This report sets a number of practical and realistic recommendations – **including the creation of a second Deputy Mayor, additional to the existing Deputy Mayor, with a specific responsibility for driving the diversity and equality agenda across the Tees Valley** – which the committee believes represent a reasonable roadmap toward more representative politics in the region, which offers the Combined Authority an opportunity to cement its place as a role model for other mayoral and combined authorities, enhance its profile and reputation inside and outside of the Tees Valley and even to deliver more emphatically on its strategic aims.

Other recommendations include:

- **Named substitutes for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be introduced, where practicable of a different gender or from a different protected characteristic group to the regular member.**
- **Tees Valley councils should immediately begin recording and reporting the ethnicity, gender and sexuality of members in the same way as they already do with staff members.**
- **TVCA should commit itself to the ambition of becoming the first Combined Authority to secure Diversity Champion status.**

- **Asking Local Authority Leaders to publically commit to a gender balanced cabinet and committee system where practicable and acknowledge the risk of unconscious bias influencing the allocation of portfolios.**
- **The Combined Authority should lobby central government to extend entitlement to time off from work for the conduct of public duties to Combined Authorities, Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships and to conduct a review of financial disincentives preventing political engagement, in particular by currently under-represented groups.**
- **The Combined Authority must comprehensively define the roles and responsibilities of portfolio positions and provide job descriptions to portfolio holders.**
- **Recommending both TVCA and its constituent authorities consult on the most appropriate timing of meetings to maximise attendance, and investigate what technological solutions are available to allow remote attendance at meetings.**
- **The Tees Valley Combined Authority should commission an independent audit of its premises to ensure accessibility, and seek to secure Disability Confident status at the earliest opportunity.**
- **The Tees Valley Combined Authority should ensure that all Cabinet reports include a thorough and meaningful Equalities Impact assessment, and that this assessment is carried out only by suitably qualified staff.**

As another interview subject noted:

*“If we get this right it will make the Combined Authority more visible and relevant, and it will encourage other businesses and organisations to be the same. A lot of people look to us for leadership, we have to be an exemplar and put it at the heart of what we do”*

**Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

## **2. Why this matters**

Achieving more representative membership of the Tees Valley is not about window-dressing. There are significant organisational benefits to achieving a more representative membership.

### **Better Decision Making**

The Tees Valley Combined Authority exists to better meet the employment and transport needs of the people of the Tees Valley – but these needs vary, for example, between genders.

In employment terms, women in the Tees Valley earn 20% less as a whole and 13.9% less an hour than men. They are 6.8% more likely to be economically inactive. They are three times more likely to work part-time (source: Office of National Statistics)

In transport terms, the North East is the only region in the country where women undertake longer commutes than men. Women are twice as likely as men to commute as a car passenger and are twice as likely as men to commute by bus. Men are five times more likely to commute by bicycle (source: Office of National Statistics)

It would be unfair to suggest that councillors are capable only of representing people whose attributes match their own, but there can be little debate that the Tees Valley would benefit from a wider range of human experience being represented within its elected membership.

### **Delivering Organisational Priorities**

Research from consultants McKinsey has shown a significant relationship between more diverse leadership teams and the elevated presence of women in the organisation and corporate performance.

Companies in the top quartile of racial diversity are 35% more likely to record above average financial returns. More diverse companies appear better able to win top talent and improve customer and employee satisfaction and decision-making. The study concludes that its findings indicate “that companies that commit to diverse leadership are more successful”.

There is also the possibility that improved organisational diversity could even contribute towards the Combined Authority’s strategic aims. For example 31% of Tees Valley IT employers have reported a skills shortage – compared to 6% nationally. Over the past three years the percentage of females starting apprenticeships has however consistently fallen – prominent women in organisations such as ours have the power to inspire younger women, to aspire to the sorts of careers in which the Tees Valley’s economy needs them to aspire to.

## **Bridging the Confidence Gap**

A Combined Authority is new concept which is not yet fully embedded in the consciousness of the region. If it is to achieve this the Tees Valley Combined Authority need to command the confidence of and appear credible to the people it serves.

To do that it needs to look like its local communities or risk under-represented groups believing that their needs have been overlooked or are unimportant, causing them to disengage from both the organisation and the democratic process in general.

### 3. Initial Findings from surveys of memberships of Constituent Authorities and Combined Authorities.

#### Diversity and elected representation in the Tees Valley

52% of people in the Tees Valley are women – but only 42% of its councillors, and **15% of councillors involved in the Tees Valley Combined Authority**

Although the regions proportion of female councillors is **higher than the national average of 33% and equivalent to the average of 45% found in other metropolitan boroughs**, it thins out dramatically at the top of our political organisations and does not translate into leadership positions and cabinet positions, where:

- **80% of Tees Valley Council Leaders are male**
- **100% of Deputy Leaders are male**
- **70% of Cabinet Members are male**

	<b>Total Councillors</b>	<b>Total Male Councillors</b>	<b>Total Female Councillors</b>	<b>Percentage Male Councillors</b>	<b>Percentage Female Councillors</b>
<b>Darlington</b>	49	28	21	57	43
<b>Hartlepool</b>	33	22	11	67	33
<b>Middlesbrough</b>	46	25	21	54	46
<b>Stockton</b>	56	31	25	55	45
<b>Redcar &amp; Cleveland</b>	58	33	25	57	43
<b>TEES VALLEY</b>	242	139	101	58	42

As a result, when the elected Mayor is included in these figures, **81% of elected members** on the Tees Valley Combined Authority Cabinet are male.

At the start of this study, just **14% of the Tees Valley Combined Authority Cabinet**, 13% of its Local Enterprise Partnership board and **16% of the members of its statutory committees** were female.

	<b>Total Members</b>	<b>Total Male Members</b>	<b>Total Female Members</b>	<b>Percentage Male Members</b>	<b>Percentage Female Members</b>
<b>DBC Cabinet</b>	7	5	2	71	29

<b>HBC Policy Committee Chairs</b>	6	5	1	83	17
<b>MBC Cabinet</b>	9	5	4	56	44
<b>SBC Cabinet</b>	7	5	2	71	29
<b>R&amp;BC Cabinet</b>	8	6	2	75	25
<b>Total LA Cabinet</b>	37	26	11	70	30
<b>TVCA Cabinet</b>	7	6	1	86	14
<b>LEP Board/Associate Cabinet Members</b>	12	10	2	83	17
<b>Total Cabinet</b>	19	16	3	84	16
<b>Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b>	15	11	4	73	27
<b>Audit &amp; Governance Committee</b>	8	6	2	75	25
<b>Transport Committee</b>	6	6	0	100	0
<b>Total TVCA Committees</b>	48	39	9	81	19

It should be noted that since the commencing of this study, the Local Enterprise Partnership (associate members of Cabinet) has publically committed itself to achieving a 50/50 gender balance by 2020, and undertaken a recruitment campaign aimed at diversifying its membership. This process culminated in the appointment of 3 additional female members at the Cabinet meeting of November 2018.

According to the Office of National Statistics, as of November 2018, 5% of the working age population of the Tees Valley were classified as being members of ethnic minorities, breaking down on an area-by-area basis as follows:

- **Middlesbrough 11%**
- **Stockton 5%**

- **Darlington 4%**
- **Hartlepool 2%**
- **Redcar & Cleveland 1%**

At a council level it is impossible to say with any authority how representative Tees Valley elected memberships are, as this data is regrettably not recorded by councils.

We estimate that in the region of 3% of Tees Valley councillors are from ethnic minority backgrounds, slightly lower than the population as a whole. On an area-by-area basis these figures break down as follows:

- **Middlesbrough 7%**
- **Darlington 4%**
- **Hartlepool, Stockton and Redcar & Cleveland 0%**

It was not possible to identify any Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic members represented in the Cabinets of the five Constituent Authorities, the Tees Valley Combined Authority Cabinet or any of the statutory committees of the Combined Authority, and just one member of the Local Enterprise Partnership.

It was also not possible to identify any members of these groups who considered themselves to have a disability.

On an officer level, the Combined Authority has a very good story to tell on diversity. Out of 105 staff members employed by the organisation in November 2018, **62% were women** and **6%** came from BAME backgrounds.

At a management level, **75% of directors** (including the Chief Executive, Strategy Director and the Investment Director) and 42% of Heads of Service and Managers were women. This is replicated at local authority level where two of the five Tees Valley council Chief Executives are currently women, a figure scheduled to rise to three out of five early in 2019.

The Annual Population Survey published by the Office of National Statistics found that 2% of UK residents over the age of 16 identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

At a council level it is again near-impossible to say with any authority how representative Tees Valley elected memberships are in terms of LGBT+ members as this data is also not recorded by councils.

### **How this compares with other local authorities**

The gender balance of the Tees Valley council membership is currently better or in line with other councils, as demonstrated in the below table (source LGIU)

	<b>Percentage Councillors Male</b>	<b>Percentage Councillors Female</b>
<b>Tees Valley</b>	58	42
<b>North East Councils</b>	59	41
<b>UK Councils</b>	67	32
<b>UK Metropolitan Boroughs</b>	64	36

The Fawcett Society Local Government Commission (July 2017 and September 2018) however painted a stark picture of the lack of progress being made toward equality in council memberships, reporting:

- **3000 women councillors must be elected in order to reach 50/50 gender balance.**
- **At current rates of progress it will take English County Councils 48 years to reach equality.**
- **17% of council leaders are women.**
- **6 in 7 of council cabinet jobs that lead to the leadership go to men.**
- **Men out-number women in 97% of councils.**
- **30% of councils returned fewer women in 2018 than 2017**

These findings prompted Sam Smethers from the Fawcett Society to state: *“This is really disappointing. We are literally crawling along. As we mark the centenary of women’s suffrage, women’s representation across local government is stuck in the past”*

In response, Cllr Marianne Overton, from the Local Government Association noted: *“This report rightly recognises that progress must be made at a faster pace to ensure a greater representation of women in our local authorities... local government must be at the forefront of driving change”.*

The now-disbanded Centre for Women and Democracy in 2011, made a number of key observations about the councils and their leadership, including:

- **76% of leaders appointed that year were men replacing men.**
- **Women leaders are “very unlikely to have children of school age” – just 4%**

- **From a total of 2804 portfolio-holders in England, only 26% of positions are held by women.**
- **There is no correlation between the number of women councillors and the number of women portfolio holders.**

The Green Park 500 Public Leadership survey, a review of diversity of the UK's public sector also reported that **“the presence of ethnic minorities at the highest level of local government remains well short of parity”**, with 4.1% of the leadership of metropolitan boroughs of the kind found across the Tees Valley from non-White British backgrounds, compared to 13% of the wider population.

### **How this compares with other Combined Authorities.**

The diversity of the membership of the Tees Valley Combined Authority is broadly in line with those of the fully-established Mayoral Combined Authorities, in which:

- **100% of Elected Mayors of Combined Authorities are men**
- **88% of Combined Authority Cabinet Members are Men**
- **68% of Combined Authority Committee Elected Members are Men**

As with our own figures it is difficult to accurately assess the ethnic background of members of other Combined Authorities, but it would superficially appear that those Authorities representing areas of higher diversity have higher subsequent representation at Combined Authority level.

Other Combined Authorities have made high profile efforts to improve the diversity of their membership, including:

- Constitutionally recognised Deputy Mayors of differing gender to the incumbent mayor (Greater London, Greater Manchester)
- Each Constituent Authority contributes two Cabinet Members (one man, one woman) to the Cabinet with second member acting as deputy portfolio holder (Liverpool City Region)
- The co-option of more representative Associate Cabinet Members (Greater Manchester)
- Co-opted committee members (West Midlands/Cambridge and Peterborough).

#### **4. Findings from interviews with Local Authority Leaders and Chief Executives, Local Enterprise Partnership Members and the Mayor of the Tees Valley.**

Between August and November 2018, the Committee held formal face-to-face interviews with the following key stakeholders of the Tees Valley Combined Authority.

- Ben Houchen, Tees Valley Mayor
- Cllr Stephen Harker, Leader of Darlington Borough Council
- Paul Wildsmith, Managing Director of Darlington Borough Council
- Cllr Christopher Akers-Belcher, Leader of Hartlepool Borough Council
- Gillian Alexander, Chief Executive of Hartlepool Borough Council
- David Budd, Mayor of Middlesbrough
- Tony Parkinson, Chief Executive of Middlesbrough Council
- Cllr Bob Cook, Leader of Stockton on Tees Borough Council
- Neil Schneider, Chief Executive of Stockton on Tees Borough Council
- Cllr Sue Jeffrey, Leader of Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
- Amanda Skelton, Chief Executive of Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
- Paul Booth, Chair of the Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership
- Siobhan McArdle, Member of the Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership
- Angela Howey, Member of the Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership
- Beth Farhat, Secretary of the Trades Union Congress North and Member of the Tees Valley Combined Authority Education, Employment and Skills Partnership Board.

Although a wide range of views were voiced, a number of key themes and observations emerged from this process.

##### **1. Stakeholders unanimously recognised that the current membership of the Tees Valley Combined Authority is inadequately representative of the population of the region.**

Not a single interview subject expressed the view that the current membership of the Tees Valley Combined Authority was desirable or representative of the population it exists to serve.

Indeed, many stakeholders frequently expressed pronounced frustration with the lack of progress being made in this area and its potential negative impact upon the reputation and effectiveness of the Combined Authority.

*“We’re definitely not representative... a retired men’s club? You’re not far wrong”*

*“Any public body should reflect the community it serves in terms of gender – not just men and women but other genders too –and other under-represented groups...When it comes to diversity, ours is very poor, one of the worst”*

*“The ideal gender balance should be 50/50. Females are currently under-represented on the LEP and TVCA and I feel you are not close to achieving this. TVCA and the LEP do need to take a more pro-active approach to encouraging females to sit on the board. Presently it is full of white middle-class males who have been long-serving members so it feels like a clique”*

*“This is overdue. This is an issue I have flagged up again and again. Just look at the pictures of the signing of the devolution deal... its all grumpy old men! You still see that in meetings and you still see it too often. From Tees Valley Unlimited to the LEP to the Shadow Combined Authority we’ve never been representative of our communities and we need to be”*

*“The gender split should be 50/50”*

*“You’ve got to...make people see that this organisation is open to everyone... TVCA is the opposite of that. It’s overwhelmingly male”*

*“Ideally we should be reflecting the make-up of the population, which is 51% female and 49% male but half the population think it’s just an old boys club. When you see publicity photos I think people switch off because they think ‘it’s nothing to do with people like me’”*

*“I’m not saying we need a 50/50 gender split but it would be good for the Cabinet to have more lady members and ethnic minorities. We need to represent everyone in the Tees Valley. You can see that we don’t have that diversity by looking around the room”*

Interview subjects also noted that their experience of their own organisations demonstrated that improved diversity could only be achieved through pro-active effort and not a patient belief in organic progress.

*“When I was appointed I asked for a report into how under-represented women were at senior level and how under-represented other groups were too. It didn’t tell us anything we didn’t already know. I gave a senior staff member a specific corporate role for changing things”.*

**2. Interview subjects universally recognised the value of a more representative Combined Authority membership to both the organisation itself and the wider Tees Valley region.**

A significant proportion of those interviewed agreed that a more representative membership could have a significantly positive impact on the quality of policy and decision-making by the Tees Valley Combined Authority, assist in the delivery of its strategic vision for the region and improve the visibility and reputation of the organisation.

*“We want a diverse range of views, but we have a homogenous group of people from similar backgrounds, which churns out very similar ideas about what we need to do”*

*“When we put out publications I get very frustrated because all the images are male. Men in hard hats, men in hi-vis jackets. Imagery is important and this just reinforces that. It’s a self-fulfilling prophecy... If we’re going to have a broader economy we need a much more diverse workforce”*

*“If we get this right it will make the Combined Authority more visible and relevant, and it will encourage other businesses and organisations to be the same. A lot of people look to us for leadership, we have to be an exemplar and put it at the heart of what we do.... when we send all male panels to conferences it reflects us as a region”*

*“If you have a male-dominated management team you are definitely missing something”*

*“You don’t get better policy coming forward if you exclude 50% of the population from the process. You get better decisions from a more diverse group of people”*

*“Whilst the number of women interested in technology-related career falls, the tech job market is growing faster than any other. If we’re going to meet the technology workforce needs, then we need to start appealing more to the gender that makes up 51% of the population. When it comes to recruitment, diversity can help you build your business and attract talent that wouldn’t normally apply for positions with your company. If you can build a leadership team to have a fair gender representation you can inspire other females to aim higher in their career”*

**3. Representatives of both the Combined Authority and its Constituent Authorities reported the existence of significant obstacles making it hard for them to deliver on aspirations of a more representative elected membership.**

It is beyond question that improving representation in the elected element of the Tees Valley Combined Authority is a far from simple process. The vast majority of positions are constitutionally granted to council leaders and cabinet portfolio holders. As 80% of Tees Valley Council leaders are men, 100% of deputy leaders and 75% of cabinet members, there is very little room for manoeuvre at Combined Authority level when it comes to achieving a balanced cabinet.

Subjects were quick to point out that improving the diversity of elected membership was more difficult in practice than in theory, in particular highlighting both a lack of female and minority councillors to seek such positions, and a lack in particular of willingness from female members to put themselves forward.

Put simply, stakeholders pointed out that there are simply not enough women and even fewer ethnic minority members within their elected memberships to choose from, fewer still wish to or feel able to be chosen.

*“It’s up to the Local Authorities to put forward their members. All political parties should be getting better representation of women. Councils should be doing much more, but we are at the whim of those councils”*

*“We elect on portfolios and women don’t put themselves forward for positions like resources or regeneration. Where women perceive their focus to be, or other people perceive their focus to be, tends to be ‘softer’ areas like Children’s Services”*

*“In an ideal World you’d have an equal split, but the difficulty is where your councillors come from. Cabinet has always been dominated by men. It’s usually 2 or 3 women. I did have a conversation with my deputy about how we could have a gender balanced leader, deputy and cabinet, but then we have the problem of who would be able to do it and who would want to do it. I only have 29 people to choose from”*

*“We need more women leaders of councils. That’s what we really need”*

*“It’s difficult for me in a committee system. I can’t select a 50/50 cabinet, although I have to intervene at some points I allow committees to select their own Chair. I try to encourage gender balance but a lot of people don’t want the responsibility of being Chair”*

*“The way I select my Cabinet is very simple – who can do the job! We have to play around with factors like geography and even availability; it’s a lot like juggling. When you come to the end you think ‘look at that, that’s not great for equality’”*

*“It’s difficult to get women to put themselves forward. As a group we need to think about how to make all members put their names forward”*

*“The problem is the gender balance of the leaders. The long term solution is to get more women involved in politics, which will percolate upwards”*

Although as one respondent noted, with sufficient will, these obstacles can be overcome.

*“We have equality written into our Constitution. It’s hard for some of our (constituent groups) who don’t have a lot of female members – but it’s about making them think about bringing through members who are women, minority, trans and LGB”.*

**4. There was widespread acknowledgement that the purpose and significance of the Tees Valley Combined Authority is yet to become fully embedded in the consciousness of the population of the region – including its councillors.**

A tangential but significant theme to emerge from discussions is a concern of stakeholders that progress being made by TVCA is being hampered to some extent by a lack of awareness of its role and the value of engagement, and that this lack of understanding extends not just to the population as a whole but councillors of its constituent authorities.

With particular regard to this study, this factor is perceived as a reason why the membership of statutory committees such as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee itself are so lacking in diversity.

*“Nobody wants to come onto the Combined Authority. It takes a lot of pressing to make people aware of the importance of being here. They think because it’s in its infancy there’s no point in being part of it”*

*“There is an issue about how seriously members beyond the leaders take the Combined Authority and whether or not they want to engage with it constructively. There is a lack of understanding... and a legacy of people who don’t believe in the Authority or the elected Mayor”*

*“I think people are still working out what these roles are as people haven’t grown up with a Combined Authority. It’s not something people have grown up wanting to do... Members are chosen by the Labour Group but they can only do that on the basis of who volunteers. I don’t exactly have to encourage people but an explanation is often required as to why it’s necessary and why it’s important”*

*“If you are asked to represent your area on a Combined Authority it can be very daunting. It’s complex and technical and people may not feel able to do it”*

*“TVCA’s profile is driven by the mayor. People are aware of the person but lack understanding of what the body does”*

*“More work has to be done explaining to members more about what we do and how it is relevant to them and their communities. We need people to understand that it’s a positive thing”*

*“In terms of people coming onto TVCA one councillor put his hand up as he has always had an interest in scrutiny. As for the rest of the group, there was very little interest”*

#### **5. Interview subjects recognised a significant value of inspiring improved diversity through the promotion of prominent role models.**

A significant proportion of stakeholders questioned put forward the notion that the prominent female and minority figures were essential to encouraging more women and people from ethnic minority groups to engage with the political process.

*“I feel a more prominent female member of the TVCA would be beneficial, i.e. Deputy Mayor”*

*“We have to have more role models. At one time we had a full female line-up on the top table of our council, leader, mayor, Chief Executive, opposition leader and the MP too. You’ve got to use that to make people see that this organisation is open to everyone, this could be you, it isn’t just an exclusive male club”*

*“The Combined Authority is not just a small group of people in this building, people need to see that”*

*“We need people to look up and say ‘I could get there’. With people like Sue Jeffrey or Amanda Skelton and Gill Alexander those people are out there but we could have more. A female Deputy Mayor could have the benefit of doing that”*

#### **6. Stakeholders recognised a need for the Combined Authority, its Constituent Authorities and local political parties to engage far better with ethnic minority communities of the Tees Valley.**

*“Our council isn’t very diverse or representative of (the borough). But it depends on who the candidates are. For example, we have a Bangladeshi community but they aren’t party members”*

*“Is our council representative? Nothing like it. We have two BAME members, one Asian and one Caribbean, and they are both standing down”*

*“BAME members are a lot more difficult to engage with. With Asian groups in particular there seems to be a scepticism of local bodies. We have to change that.”*

*“As a council we have a BAME population of 3 or 4%, but we have a lot less employed by the council. We need to do more to encourage those communities to apply for jobs and ensure they have the skills and qualifications to apply for those jobs”*

#### **7. Interview subjects – including previous and current role-holders - agreed that the current Deputy Mayoral system is vague, undefined and under-utilised.**

Whilst the Constitution of the Tees Valley Combined Authority explicitly states that the Mayor must appoint a Deputy, and that this Deputy be appointed from the leadership of the Constituent Authorities, almost no further instruction as to purpose of this role is provided. As a result, Cabinet Members questioned the value of the role in its present form.

Indeed, some Cabinet members felt that their own portfolio roles were equally under-developed, contributing towards them being sceptical towards the value of the establishment of junior cabinet roles introduced by other Combined Authorities.

*“Very early on we looked at the appointment of Deputy Mayors, concerned in part by a lack of diversity – but the idea was not well received and the Constitution makes it difficult. It doesn’t make sense to me that there is no strategy or agenda for who we have doing that. It seems very arbitrary to me”*

*“The Deputy Mayor position is not defined at all. There was no role apart from it being a statutory requirement. I think I opened one project, which was in my area, when the Mayor couldn’t make it and maybe chaired a couple of meetings when he was away. It is pointless having a statutory Deputy Mayor if they have nothing to do. It needs defining”*

*“Our portfolio role is so under-developed anyway what would a deputy portfolio holder do?”*

*“I’m not sure I’d increase the number of positions. What would they do? We don’t want jobs that don’t do anything because, who would want those jobs?”*

*“I think the Mayor should be allowed to appoint deputies, people expect that”*

There was however one significant observation from a Cabinet Member relating to this issue.

*“We need to make sure that the narrative is all about equality, not just gender. I’m set to become Deputy Mayor next year and as a gay man if I was moved aside for a woman would that serve equality?”*

## **5. Findings of survey of elected members of the Tees Valley and Local Enterprise Partnership members.**

Between August and September of 2018 electronic surveys were circulated to the all councillors of the Tees Valley councils and members of the Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership in order to learn more about the gender, sexuality and ethnic background of the memberships, and to see if members felt their background impacted upon their council and board duties and engagement with the Tees Valley Combined Authority.

Of particular interest to the working group was ascertaining what factors prevent female and minority councillors from progressing from the backbenches of councils to positions of leadership and which prevent them from coming into contact with the Combined Authority.

78 council members completed the survey – 33% of the total.

7 Local Enterprise Partnership Members completed the survey – 58% of the total at the time.

Full results are attached as Appendix 1, but significant findings are detailed below.

What is clear from the survey is that a significant number of female councillors feel held back by their caring responsibilities, not feeling qualified to participate in the TVCA and not having enough confidence to participate.

We have also learned that Tees Valley Councillors are already in many case working full-time or more than full-time hours in their council responsibilities, ethnic minority members believe their backgrounds hold them back and LGBT+ members believe TVCA does not do enough to engage with their community.

What is also highly worthy of note is how LEP members unanimously believed the aims and objectives of TVCA are unclear to wider communities.

- **What the survey tells us about the membership of the Tees Valley councils**
  - 63% of Tees Valley Councillors are over 60
  - 64.5% identify as Christian, 32.9% as having no religion, 1.3% Muslim and 1% are an “other” religion.
  - 97% of councillors identify as “white British” or “white other” with 1.3% identifying as “British Asian”.

- 100% of these “British Asian” councillors believe their ethnic background has held them back, and 100% believe TVCA would be more representative and effective with BAME people represented at cabinet or committee level.
  - 25% of councillors have a caring responsibility (possibly as high as 30% when ‘prefer not to say’ results are included)
  - 52% of councillors are spending 21-50 hours on their council duties, equivalent to a full-time or mostly-full-time job.
  - 22% believe themselves to have a disability, but 88% of those respondents do not believe it has made it more difficult for them to progress as councillors. 69% of those councillors felt the CA would be more effective or representative with people with disabilities represented at cabinet or committee level,
  - 5% of councillors are bisexual, 1% gay, 0% lesbian and 2.7% would rather not disclose their sexual orientation.
  - 80% of these councillors do not think the CA does enough to engage with their community.
  - 11% of councillors – 8 in total – do not identify as being the gender they were assigned at birth.
- **The obstacles faced by female councillors in the Tees Valley**
    - 26% of female councillors thought their gender was an obstacle to progress.
    - Obstacles female members reported included:
      - Caring commitments (43%)
      - Not feeling qualified (57%)
      - A lack of confidence (29%)
      - Professional commitments (14%)
      - A lack of interest (14%)
    - Obstacles they thought other women faced included:
      - Caring commitments (50%)
      - Professional commitments (36%)
      - A lack of confidence (36%)
      - Not feeling qualified enough (29%)

- A lack of interest (29%)
  - Sexism (18%)
- 87% think it is important to increase the number of women in Cabinet and Committee roles.
- 43% believed senior appointments were made with an intentional or unintentional gender bias.
- **What do councillors think should be done?**
  - 48% believe proactive steps should be taken to promote prominent female role models
  - 62% backed the creation of junior portfolio roles
  - 31% supported help with caring expenses
  - 17% backed specific positions or positions for women, 21% a dedicated equalities portfolio holder, 21% an equalities committee
  - 44% supported additional training and 41% mentoring opportunities.
  - 45% supported more flexible meeting times.
  - 34% supported the use of technology to attend meetings remotely.
- **What the survey tells us about the membership of the Local Enterprise Partnership**
  - 86% of LEP board members identified as White British, 14% as “Other”.
  - 43% identified as Christian, 43% as having no religion and 14% would prefer not to say.
  - 100% gave their sexual orientation as “heterosexual”
  - 1 member reported that their gender was different to the one assigned at birth.

- 71% were male, 29% female (indicating that 100% of women on the LEP board at the time of the survey participated)
- 100% reported that they were working full-time.
- 66% of LEP members reported that they work in their substantive jobs for at least 41 hours a week, and in the case of 33% more than 61 hours.
- 43% felt materials such as recruitment adverts and personal specifications gave potential candidates a false impression that they are not qualified or experienced enough to join the LEP.
- Reasons LEP members believe prevented people from applying to serve on the LEP Board – women and ethnic minorities in particular included:
  - A lack of understanding about the role and responsibilities of the LEP (100%)
  - Not feeling the role is for people like us (71%)
  - Not having the time to commit (71%)
  - Family or personal reasons (43%)
  - Disagreeing with the concept of the LEP or the Tees Valley Combined Authority (14%)

## 6. Recommendations

Having considered the evidence gathered through an extensive research-gathering process, the Overview and Scrutiny has the following recommendations to make.

As laid out in the Constitution of the Tees Valley Combined Authority it requests that a formal response be received within two month of this report's presentation to Cabinet.

### **1. The Tees Valley Combined Authority should introduce an additional Deputy Mayor – who constitutionally must be of a different gender or protected characteristic group to the incumbent Mayor.**

This study has not just revealed a need and desire for more prominent representation at the heart of the leadership of the Tees Valley Combined Authority, but the need for enhanced capacity within the organisation for engaging with communities and promoting the work and significance of the Combined Authority. The creation of the position for a prominent, high profile and credible Deputy Mayor, in addition to the existing local authority deputy mayor, would be the ideal way of meeting these needs.

This study has also revealed that many female and ethnic minority councillors – and prospective councillors - feel held back by a lack of expertise and a lack of confidence. Although some individual councils reported making efforts to address these issues, provision was inconsistent and lacking in central leadership and drive. Again, a prominent, high profile and credible Deputy Mayor would be ideally placed to co-ordinate work tackling these issues and lead on a regional level on removing the structural barriers to progress.

This position would be in addition to and not in replacement of the existing Deputy Mayor (Local Authority) who would continue to substitute for the Mayor as required.

Although the precise role and responsibilities of this post holder would be subject to wider consultation and development, we envisage this individual having a specific portfolio responsibility for Equalities and Opportunity and being tasked collaborating with local councils, community, faith and interest groups and businesses to overcoming the obstacles to public participation with politics revealed by this study, adding value to the work of the Mayor and the wider Combined Authority in engaging with communities and councils across the Tees Valley and working with Local Authorities to co-ordinate the development of networks, training programmes and mechanisms aimed at inspiring and creating a new generation of local leaders better reflecting the population of the region and proactively seek out women and minority councillors and potential councillors for leadership programmes.

*“How do you get more women involved? It has to come from the organisations who are sending people forward”* said one Cabinet Member interviewed for this study. The appointment of such a Deputy Mayor would allow the Combined Authority to empower its constituent councils to do just that.

In preparation for the creation of this position we additionally recommend that Local Authorities consult with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny to comprehensively establish existing support aimed at attracting, retaining and developing under-represented councillors with a view to establishing how best the Combined Authority could add value to these efforts.

- 2. Constituent Authorities should nominate named substitutes for the Tees Valley Overview and Scrutiny Committee, where practicable of a different gender or from a different protected characteristic group to the regular member. These substitute members would also be invited to attend Committee meetings as non-voting members.**

TVCA’s 5 constituent council’s currently nominate 3 councillors from their elected membership to sit on TVCA’s Statutory Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

This committee does not currently require the local authorities to nominate substitute members to attend in the absence of full members, as it does with other statutory committees. As a result, achieving quorum has from time to time been problematic and representation from the differing local authorities varies significantly from an average membership of 2.8 members for one council to 0.8 to another.

Not only would the nomination of substitute members potentially tackle these attendance issues, by inviting them to attend and even participate in meetings it would encourage more councillors to participate more actively in the working of Combined Authority, in a limited and manageable capacity, and allow newer and less experienced councillors to develop their skills, confidence and familiarity of local government in preparation for progressing to more prominent roles.

- 3. The Tees Valley’s Constituent Authorities Councils should commit to immediately recording and reporting of the ethnicity, gender and sexuality of members in the same way as they do with staff members.**

It is not possible to assess the representativeness of council membership in terms of BAME and LGBT+ membership as no reliable statistics exist.

This study has been unable to comprehensively assess how representative the councillors of the Tees Valley are of the communities they serve as none of those councils are currently

recording details of their councillor's ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation in the same manner as they are legally required to for staff members. This is an unfortunate oversight which could and should be rectified almost overnight.

- 4. The Tees Valley Combined Authority should lobby government to extend the legal entitlement to time off work for public duties enjoyed by public role holders such as magistrates, to councillors carrying out activities relating to Combined Authorities, Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships and to conduct a review of financial disincentives preventing political engagement, in particular by currently under-represented groups.**

*"It's relatively difficult to find women to stand in the first place, there are a huge number of ways in which we don't make it easy for councillors"*

*"Would remuneration help? Remuneration is a dilemma. There are some people where it would be true, especially people in low paid jobs or who can't afford to go part-time. But people outside of the process still see it as something that should be done in a voluntary capacity. But that doesn't buy food or pay the mortgage. There's a conversation to be had with the electorate who don't see the complexity and commitment of being a councillor"*

It is clear that significant obstacles exist preventing willing volunteers from maximising their participation in public life – issues such as domestic and caring duties and attendant cultural attitudes, and working and financial commitments which tend to disproportionately affect female, younger, less affluent and working councillors.

Whilst it goes beyond the ability of the Combined Authority or its constituent authorities to address these issues alone, the committee believes a national conversation is necessary about what we expect from our councillors and what practical measures can be implemented to allow them to better exercise their duties.

- 5. The Tees Valley Combined Authority must comprehensively define the roles and responsibilities of portfolio positions and provide job descriptions to portfolio holders.**

Portfolio holders reported a lack of clarity with regards to the specific expectations and responsibilities of their roles. Once this work is carried out, it will be possible to accurately assess what support those portfolio holders require in this role, including but not exclusive to additional political support.

Although the Committee is stopping short at this stage of outright recommendation of the introduction of assistant portfolio holder roles, this may be revisited at a later date. In the meantime we would ask Council Leaders to consider formally mentoring a junior councillor from their own authority, whose responsibilities may include assisting with work relating to the Tees Valley Combined Authority.

**6. Both the Tees Valley Combined Authority and its Constituent Authorities should consult with members on meeting times to ensure that they are as accessible as possible to all members.**

Given the prevalence of shift-work in the Tees Valley and the comparative decline of the traditional nine-to-five employment, alternative meeting times alone should not be considered a panacea to improved political engagement from currently under-represented groups, but it cannot be overlooked that 44% of councillors surveyed endorsed more flexible meeting times as a means of addressing gender imbalance.

Both the Combined Authority and Local Authority should commit to carrying out periodic reviews that all meetings are timetabled or order to maximise accessibility and attendance of both members and prospective members.

**7. Both the Tees Valley Combined Authority and its Constituent Authorities should investigate potential use of technology to enable the remote attendance of meetings.**

It is clear that many elected members face practical difficulties in terms of physically attending meetings both their own councils and the Combined Authority, related to professional and caring commitments and even mobility.

In 2019 this should not be physically necessary for members to attend these meetings in person when adequate and affordable technology allows them to participate remotely, and both TVCA and its constituent councils should investigate the procurement of such technology if they have not already done so.

**8. The Tees Valley Combined Authority should commission an independent audit of its premises to ensure accessibility, and seek to secure Disability Confident status at the earliest opportunity.**

88% of survey respondents identifying as having a disability led reported that their disability did not prevent them from engaging with the TVCA, but there is nonetheless significant merit in commissioning of independent analysis of TVCA premises, and even more value in being able to publically emphasise that this is an organisation which takes disability rights seriously.

**9. The Tees Valley Combined Authority should set itself the ambition of becoming the first Combined Authority to secure Diversity Champion status.**

The Tees Valley Combined Authority is uniquely placed in both the Tees Valley, the North East and other Combined and Mayoral Authorities to offer leadership on LGBT+ equality. Working with the charity Stonewall to become the first Combined Authority to achieve the recognised standard organisational excellence in LGBT+ equality, Diversity Champion status, represents the ideal way of catalysing this work.

**10. The Tees Valley Combined Authority should ensure that all Cabinet reports include a thorough and meaningful Equalities Impact assessment, and that this assessment is carried out only by suitably qualified staff.**

The Combined Authority must guard against the temptation of assuming that issues like gender are irrelevant in economic development decisions and ensure that all relevant staff have the appropriate training to factor these issues into their proposals.

**11. Constituent Authority Leaders are asked to publically commit to a gender balanced cabinets and committees in their councils, where practicable, and acknowledge the risk of unconscious bias influencing the allocation of portfolios. Constituent Authority Leaders should also commit to reviewing mental health support offered to councillors.**

At present just 30% of local authority cabinet members are women, and those women are overwhelmingly to be found in the same “caring” portfolios with little interaction with TVCA.

43% of those surveyed believed that the appointment of senior councillors was made with an intentional or unintentional gender bias.

While acknowledging the practical difficulties leaders face when building balanced cabinets and the interests and ambitions of individual councillors, leaders should be aware of how striking it is that only two female Tees Valley Cabinet members currently hold portfolios

relating to economic development, resources, transport and housing – the most likely portfolios to engage with the Combined Authority and statistically the most likely positions from which cabinet members progress to council leadership.

**12. The Tees Valley Combined Authority should consider how existing local authority-specific events showcasing the diversity of the Tees Valley – such as Pride and Mela- can be developed into region-wide events.**

The individual authorities of the Tees Valley have a good deal to be proud of in terms of specific cultural events showcasing our region's diversity. The Combined Authority should use its position and leverage to add maximum value, capacity to these events, driving their popularity and profile.

In addition to these recommendations it should be noted that the Committee would have recommended that the Local Enterprise Partnership commit to securing a balanced gender membership within a set timeframe and take proactive steps to recruit more female and BAME members. However the LEP independently recognised its weakness in this area and voluntarily made a commitment in November 2018 to achieving a 50/50 gender balance by 2020, as well as undertaking a recruitment campaign aimed at diversifying its membership which has already yielded the appointment of 3 additional female members.