

30 Women in Local Government: Celebrating CLGF's 30th Anniversary

Featured Interviewee #13: Cllr Louise Gittins

Chair, Local Government Association & Leader, Cheshire West and Chester Council



Profile

Cllr Louise Gittins was first elected to Cheshire West and Chester Council in 2011 and became Leader in 2019, after serving as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Wellbeing. As Council

Leader, she leads work on Devolution, Public Service Reform, Climate Emergency, and the local Health Economy.

Beyond the borough, she is Vice Chair of Transport for the North, Chair of the Cheshire and Merseyside Health Partnership, and leads the Cheshire and Warrington Sub-Regional Leaders Board.

Nationally, Louise chairs the Local Government Association (LGA) Board, having previously chaired its Children and Young People Board. Under her leadership, the Government created a new Leaders' Council - realising a key LGA call for stronger national-local partnership.

A champion for inclusion and wellbeing, Louise continues to prioritise care leavers and health inequalities while strengthening local government's voice, collaboration, and impact across the UK.

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Interview Highlights

1. How has the role of women in local government evolved over the past three decades, and how do you think women can accelerate action for gender equality today?

I am seeing far more women in leadership roles in Local Government, but I think there is a long way to go as the balance is still against us. I have just returned from the UK Local Government Forum where I met some inspirational women in leadership roles across our four nations. We were discussing civility in public life and in particular the pressures women face e.g., on social media and our concerns around the future. We discussed our concerns that women, in particular, are being put off becoming a Councillor. The four leaders of our respective Local Government organisations came together to sign a [Civility in Public Life statement](#), have agreed to lobby UK government, and to meet regularly to share good practice. I have come away feeling hopeful, and it was great to see the support from our male colleagues too.



2. What inspired you to enter local government, and how has your journey advanced gender equality in your community or country?

I hadn't planned on becoming a Councillor and was not expected to win my seat. However, when I did, I made a pledge to myself that I needed to be the best I could, and to make the most of my time in this privileged position and to serve my community. I had spent time in my career working with women and encouraging them to make the most of their leadership roles, and as a new community leader, I knew I needed to step up.

3. What has been your most rewarding experience as a woman leader in local government, and how did it contribute to promoting gender equality?

Encouraging other women to become Councillors, supporting them in their roles and promoting them within the council structures. I believe training and mentorship is empowering and builds confidence and supports my fellow women councillors. However, as a leader of a council, I also have an impact on the officer core and the values that run throughout the organisation. I am proud to lead a council with my female deputy and my female Chief Executive. The same can be said with my role as Chair of the LGA where I work with some inspirational women leaders of all political colours and within the officer group.

4. What challenges did you face as a woman entering local government, and how did you overcome them? What can be done to accelerate overcoming these barriers for future women leaders?

I personally didn't feel I had barriers to overcome, however I have faced everyday sexism from male councillors, and this has made me even more determined to succeed and to prove them wrong. I have been very clear about my values, my hopes and dreams and try to articulate this whenever I can. I have had a lot of support from other women leaders, and this is very powerful and gives me the strength to keep on going and not to give up. I am seeing a rise in misogyny, and I think national leaders need to do more to call this behaviour out.

5. What advice would you give to other women considering a career in local government to help them accelerate gender equality in their communities?

If you have a dream then do whatever you can to achieve your dream - believe in yourself. As a young woman, I used to have a poster on my wall which said 'Climb high, climb far, your aim the sky, your goal the star'. Be clear about your values and what motivates you and speak to other women for support. Don't give up!

6. How can we encourage more women, particularly young women, to enter leadership roles in local government, and what actions can governments take to create more inclusive environments for women?

More should be done within schools and encouraging young girls to put their names forward, e.g. the youth senedd and youth parliament. Women in leadership roles should act as mentors for young women to enable them to reach their potential. There needs to be more support for women who have families and/or are carers: the role can be very demanding. The biggest challenge we face is social media and national politicians, of all colours, need to be calling out misogyny for what it is. Councillors should also have the same protections rightly afforded by members of parliament, in terms of their personal safety.

Cllr Louise Gittins (UK LGA)



7. Why is it urgent to increase the number and influence of women in local government, and how will this contribute to positive change in governance?

Women make up just over 50% of the population, so to ensure their voice is represented then we need 50% of local councillors to be women. We bring a unique perspective to decision making and leadership and our voice needs to be heard.

8. How has digital technology helped or can help accelerate women's political inclusion in local government, and what steps should we take to make it more accessible to women in leadership?

During Covid we moved to holding meetings online, and this has continued. This means that women with children/caring responsibilities can attend meetings from home when needed (e.g. if having childcare issues). The LGA has called for hybrid decision making meetings to be legislated for, and we have called on government to move quickly with this decision.

9. What innovative practices or strategies have you used to accelerate women's participation and leadership in local government in your region or country?

The LGA has a 'Be a Councillor' campaign which encourages people to become councillors [Be a Councillor | Local Government Association](#). At a local level we actively encourage women to become councillors and run webinars to talk about it with role models.

10. As CLGF celebrates 30 years, what actions must be taken in the next 30 years to ensure the continued empowerment of women in local government?

Stand up to misogyny, ensure women feel safe in their elected roles, share inspiring examples, educate young women and girls via schools, get tough on poor behaviour of other elected members. Encourage women to shine!

CLGF 30th Anniversary Commemoration

In celebration of CLGF's 30th Anniversary, we are honoured to spotlight the inspiring stories of 30 trailblazing women in local government from across the Commonwealth, all members of the Commonwealth Women in Local Government Network. These interviews celebrate their groundbreaking contributions to gender equality and their transformative impact on building inclusive, empowered communities.

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#AccelerateAction | #ComWLG | #LocalGov | #IWD2025 | #CLGF30Years | @CLGF_News

Visit **CLGF's** [website](#) for more inspiring stories and to stay updated on the 30th Anniversary campaign. Thank you for being part of this important movement!