

**10/06/2009**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **New Chairperson for Women into Councils**

Jane Morrice has just become the new chairperson of Northern Ireland's Women into Local Councils group.

Ms Morrice is Deputy Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission and a former Head of the European Commission office in Belfast. She is also a former MLA and Deputy Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly.



The Women in Local Councils initiative provides a way for local government to promote positive action in the area of gender equality. Established in January 2006 by the Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland, supported by the Equality Commission, Women in Local Councils aims to encourage more women into the local government sector and encourage those already there to apply for more senior posts. It also aims to tackle the under-representation of women in local politics.

In its three years of existence, Women in Local Councils has made a difference to the profile of women in the public sector.

In 2006, there were no female chief executives in any of Northern Ireland's 26 councils, today there are three.

In the same period, the percentage of female district council chief officers has increased from 16% to 23% and the percentage of councils with no women in their top two tiers of management fell from 54% to only 27%.

Ms Morrice has definite views on what she wants Women in Local Councils to achieve under her leadership.

“Actions speak louder than words,” she says. “The time for women to come forward and take advantage of the reform of local government is now. It is crucial that the Women in Local Councils initiative uses this opportunity to ensure that, by the end of 2011, we can see a radical difference in the number of women not only in senior management positions in councils, but also at the political level. This means not only structural change, in terms of employment practices, but also and possibly more important, cultural and attitudinal change on the part of both men and women.

“As Chair of this initiative, I, alongside my deputy, Michelle McIlveen, MLA, intend to step up activities which will promote greater awareness of the important need to bring more women into high-level decision-making in local councils and of the value that gender balance brings to public service in general.

“We will be initiating a weeklong programme of events to highlight best practice. We are looking into ways to continue practical political training for aspiring female politicians and we want to provide more targeted information through a regular newsletter for council staff and others to read about role models and the experiences of other councils.”

For more details of the Women in Local Councils initiative, visit the website at  
[www.womeninlocalcouncils.org.uk](http://www.womeninlocalcouncils.org.uk)