

Women in Public Service Leadership:

Insights & Experiences

Mutual Ventures

March 2025



Foreword

At Mutual Ventures, we've spent nearly fifteen years working alongside public service leaders, and in that time, we've been lucky to meet and collaborate with so many inspiring women – leaders who care deeply, drive meaningful change, and refuse to compromise when it comes to delivering the best services for the people they serve.

This year, for International Women's Day, we wanted to do something different. We wanted to celebrate the fantastic women in our network and our own team. But we also wanted to spark a conversation: What is it really like to be a female leader in public services? Is leadership easier or harder for women? Do women bring something unique to leadership? These are not always easy questions, but at Mutual Ventures, we never shy away from a thought-provoking discussion.

These questions are also personal to me. Throughout my career, I've often reflected on what it means to lead as a woman – on the opportunities, the challenges, and the unspoken expectations that sometimes shape our experiences.

To open up the conversation, we reached out to our network, inviting perspectives from across public services. Over 80 people responded, offering insights into their experiences. The results were telling: while most respondents hadn't personally observed gender bias in leadership opportunities, 36% had. That's more than a statistic – it's a call to action. What can we do to break down barriers and ensure every leader, regardless of gender, has the chance to thrive?

This report doesn't aim to provide all the answers, but it does offer a starting point. We share reflections from our respondents, case studies of inspiring female leaders, and practical ideas for making leadership more inclusive.

We hope this report sparks discussion, challenges assumptions, and, most importantly, helps drive real change.

Agata Miskowiec

Managing Consultant, Mutual Ventures



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Context – the state of female leadership in public services

Women have long been the backbone of public services in England, making up the majority of the workforce across key sectors. But when it comes to leadership, the picture is more complex. Progress has been made, yet the climb to the top is still steeper for women, particularly for those from minority backgrounds.

Take children’s services, for example. The Association of Directors of Children’s Services (**ADCS**) **data shows that women now hold a record 64% of director roles**, the highest proportion since records began in 2008¹. A cause for celebration? Absolutely. But it is worth noting that this still falls short when you consider that **over 87% of staff in local authority children's services are women (2023)**². Why, when women dominate the workforce, do leadership roles not reflect the same balance?

The NHS, too, is a powerhouse of female talent – **76% of its workforce are women**³, a number that speaks to its deep reliance on female professionals. Yet at the highest levels, it is still a battle for representation. Amanda Pritchard made history in 2021 as the first woman to become Chief Executive of NHS England, leading the service through immense challenges. Her ascent to this pivotal role not only shattered the proverbial glass ceiling but also was anticipated to bring fresh perspectives and a renewed commitment to inclusivity. But her recent resignation has reignited the conversation: why do so few women reach the very top, and what pressures do they face when they do?

Since 2001, women have consistently made up **more than half of the civil service workforce, reaching 54.5% in 2024**³. While female representation is higher in junior grades, progress has been significant at senior levels. The proportion of women in the senior civil service has risen dramatically from 18% in 1997 to 48% in 2024, now approaching the economically active population benchmark of 49%³. The proportion of permanent secretaries who are women has also steadily risen – although there has not yet been a female cabinet secretary.

“

In my organisation there are more women than men in leadership roles, however this is reflective of the make-up of our workforce as a whole. Although there are more women than men, I think that men are probably over-represented in leadership positions.

- survey respondent

”



As we celebrate these advancements, it is imperative to delve deeper into the nuances of female leadership in public services.

Key questions arise:

Do female leaders bring unique perspectives and approaches that transform public service delivery? Exploring this can uncover the distinct advantages of diverse leadership styles.

What proactive measures can employers implement to support and nurture female talent? Identifying effective strategies is crucial for fostering an environment where women can thrive.

And what about intersectionality – the way gender, race, and socio-economic background intertwine to create even greater barriers for some women?

Engaging with these questions not only enriches the discourse on gender equality but also paves the way for actionable strategies that embed inclusivity at the core of public service leadership. Because while we can celebrate how far we have come, there is still plenty of work to do.

Survey respondents – overview

In February 2025, as part of the research process for this report, Mutual Ventures conducted a survey to understand more about the experiences and perspectives of women in leadership positions within public services. The survey posed ten questions, some of which were to better understand the context of the respondents and how that might influence their perceptions.

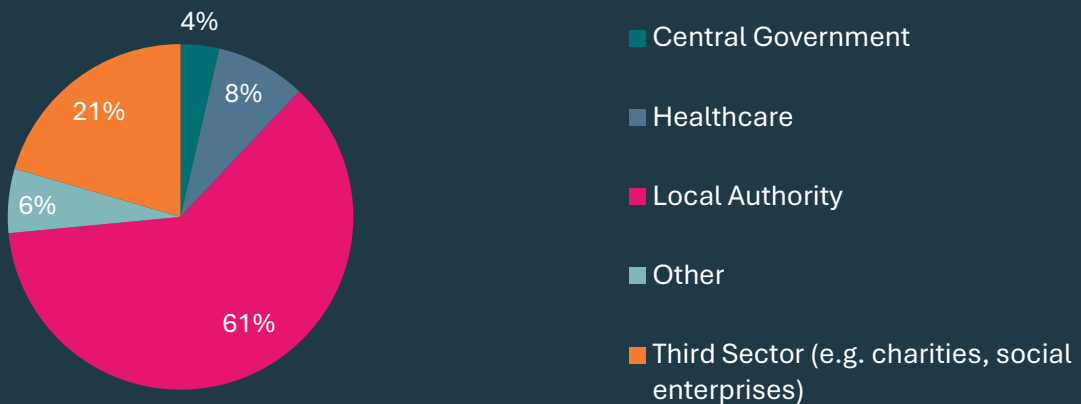
Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the survey, your time and insights are deeply appreciated!

Outlined below is the headline data:

83 Number of respondents

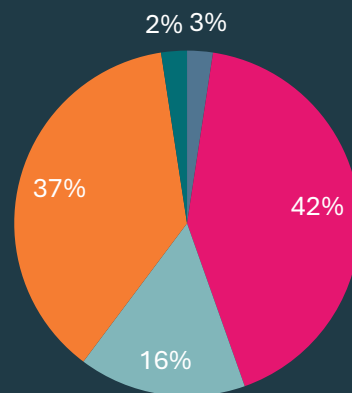
93% Respondents identifying as women

Sector respondents work in:



Role/seniority of respondents:

- Frontline Staff
- Middle Management (e.g. Manager, Head of Department)
- Other
- Senior Leadership (e.g. Director, CEO)
- Support/Admin Staff





Gender representation in leadership in public services

Nearly half (48%) of respondents reported that their organisation had a well-balanced representation of men and women in leadership roles. However, over a quarter (27%) noted that men still significantly outnumbered women in leadership positions. Encouragingly, 60% of respondents felt that their organisation actively promoted gender equality in leadership.



Barriers to leadership

When it comes to barriers, opinions were more divided. While 37% of respondents agreed that women faced additional barriers to leadership compared to men in their organisation, 36% disagreed – suggesting that experiences vary widely across different workplaces. However, more than a third (36%) reported having personally witnessed or experienced gender bias in leadership opportunities.



The value of female leadership

One of the strongest messages from the survey was the value that female leaders bring to organisations. An overwhelming 89% agreed that female leaders offer unique perspectives that positively influence organisational culture and decision-making.



Key challenges

When asked about the key barriers to female leadership in public services, cultural attitudes towards women in leadership (22%) were cited as the most significant challenge, followed by fewer women applying for leadership roles (20%), a lack of flexible working arrangements (19%), and the absence of mentorship or sponsorship (18%).



The perspective of leadership

Insights from our survey revealed that seniority correlates with perceptions about gender bias and barriers for women in leadership. Senior leaders, including Directors and CEOs, generally report a more positive view of gender diversity in leadership roles within the public sector. The survey shows that they are more likely to see a well-balanced representation of genders in leadership positions compared to those in middle management or front-line positions.

Senior leaders are also generally less likely to perceive significant barriers to female leadership and less likely to report personal experiences of gender bias. However, this perception might not fully capture the challenges faced by women at lower levels of their organisation.

This does not mean gender bias is absent at higher levels; it may simply be less visible or acknowledged due to a number of reasons:

- Women holding leadership positions may be sheltered from some of the day-to-day challenges their less senior female colleagues face due to the protection offered by their position.
- Many women who have reached senior positions will have successfully overcome

their own challenges with gender bias. They may feel that if they personally have been able to do it, despite the difficulties, then other women should be able to do so, too. This may result in them underestimating what their female colleagues in front-line and middle-management positions are facing.

- Leaders, especially those overseeing large organisations, often have limited exposure to the culture and dynamics of individual teams or divisions. As a result, even if senior leadership promotes a positive culture of female empowerment, this may not be consistently reflected across all parts of the organisation.

How does middle management see it?

In contrast, middle management respondents often have a more critical view of gender diversity. They are more likely to notice gender imbalances and biases partly because this group is attuned to the day-to-day dynamics and challenges faced by their teams, giving them a unique perspective on the experiences of their teams as well as team composition.

They also occupy a pivotal position to observe how gender diversity initiatives translate into real-world outcomes within their departments and are more exposed to the impact (or lack thereof) of these initiatives.

Middle management respondents frequently identify several barriers to women attaining senior leadership roles, including a lack of flexible working arrangements, cultural attitudes toward women in leadership, and bias in recruitment or promotion processes.

“I find that there are high levels of favouritism... recruiting friends or ex-colleagues to posts over very able internal female candidates.”

- survey respondent

The experiences of middle management provide valuable insights into the subtle and overt forms of bias that can hinder career progression for women, as they are often in a transitional phase of their careers where biases and barriers can be more pronounced. The emphasis on day-to-day challenges provides an opportunity to make practical adjustments to address these barriers and create a more inclusive environment for aspiring female leaders.

The divergence in experience and perception between senior leaders and middle managers is to be expected. It is the responsibility of leaders across all levels of an organisation to promote and support women and create a work environment centred on equity and equal opportunities for everyone.

As a leader, how can you create a more empowering environment for your female colleagues?

- Mentoring was the number one action identified by respondents to “support more women into positions of leadership”, particularly by their organisations’ leaders.

“Mentorship from leaders - this may be female or male, you just need people who see talent not gender.”
- survey respondent

- Don’t assume you understand the organisational culture from your usual day-to-day channels of engagement. You may be surprised about the reality of your staff’s experience, particularly your front-line staff. Take the time to find out.
- For a lot of people, it is difficult to report negative experiences when it comes to gender bias or discrimination, particularly to those in positions of leadership. Consider whether your organisation offers safe ways for people to share experiences or report issues anonymously, beyond just going through regular management channels.
- Ensure your hiring and promotion pathways are protected from personal bias and discrimination. For example, when reviewing applications, remove any identifying information such as first names, to ensure the outcome is based on merit and experience.



Case study:

Rachel Law, CEO of PossAbilities – social enterprise with all-female leadership team

Established in 2014 PossAbilities is a social enterprise focused on enabling vulnerable people to 'live the life they choose', by providing support to people with learning disabilities, young people leaving care and people with dementia. PossAbilities pride themselves on doing things differently and promoting a strong culture that values everyone equally. We interviewed Rachel Law, CEO at PossAbilities, to learn more about their all-female leadership team and the impact that has on their organisational culture.



MV: Can you tell us a bit about your journey to becoming the CEO of PossAbilities?

RL: *I started my career as a support worker, initially working with individuals with mental health issues who had been resettled from long-stay hospitals. I then transitioned to working with people with learning disabilities. Over time, I progressed through various management roles within the learning disability sector. And then ten years ago, I led the process of spinning out from the local authority and became the Chief Executive of PossAbilities.*

MV: Over the course of your career, have there been any managers or management styles that have influenced how you approach leadership?

RL: *Throughout my career, I experienced different management styles, including some negative ones. I learned the importance of not being dictatorial and the value of creating a positive and inclusive work environment. These experiences have helped me realise what kind of leader I want to be. I believe in an open-door policy and no hierarchy, ensuring that everyone feels valued and comfortable to speak up. Just because I'm chief executive does not make me better than anybody else; it just means I've got a different role.*

MV: Was an all-female leadership team an intentional decision from you?

RL: *When building the leadership team, it was never intentionally all-female, but rather about finding people who reflected the values of empathy, support, and inclusiveness. I believe that women often show more empathy and compassion, which aligns with our organisation's values. We really show empathy at PossAbilities and truly understand the difficulties that women face within the workplace.*

“ We dare to be different; we don't want to be the same as every other provider. We want to create a different message, take risks, and create social change.

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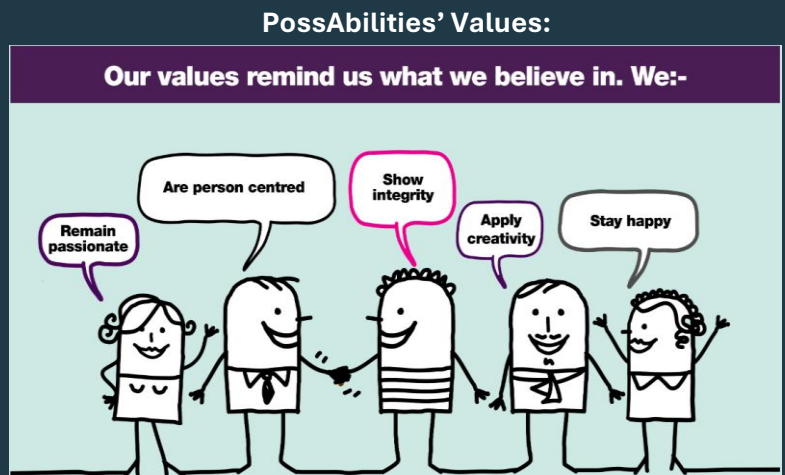
MV: What does an 'inclusive culture' look and feel like at PossAbilities?

RL: *We emphasise mentorship, especially for frontline managers, to ensure our organisation's values are upheld. The senior leadership team models positive behaviour, which is expected to trickle down through the organisation. We do an awful lot of mentorship with those frontline managers to say, "This is how we expect you to treat people." We support flexible working arrangements and understand the challenges women face in balancing work and family life.*

We conduct happiness checks to ensure staff well-being and address any issues promptly. We can check if there are any hotspots or issues within the organisation where we might have to go in and find out what's going on.

MV: How does your organisation reflect its values?

RL: *Our values were chosen by both staff and the senior leadership team. We prioritise happiness, creativity, and passion, and the leadership team actively participates in events to promote these values. One of our company values is about being happy, and we put on all sorts of different events to engage our staff and ensure they enjoy their work.*



MV: What is one piece of advice you would give to your younger self?

RL: *Be brave, be courageous, and believe in yourself.*

Reflections from Professor Donna Hall, Chair of PossAbilities

PossAbilities is an innovative adult social care social enterprise with an all-female management team and an inspirational CEO - Rachel Law. The all-female leadership team have an ego-light approach to building strategy and consensus across their team. They seek innovative solutions and build solidarity.

They have navigated a very difficult and underfunded market and achieved great success bucking the trend in staff recruitment and retention, and with all services rated "outstanding" by the CQC. They are quirky and very different with a Happiness Manifesto in place for all staff and the people they support.

It's a joy to be their Chair!
Prof Donna Hall



Championing female leadership in the public sector

By Ana Popovici

Compassion, honesty, championing social justice and equality are values which I have embraced throughout my career as a teacher, social worker, and now Deputy Chief Executive for Richmond and Wandsworth Councils and Executive Director of Children's Services in Wandsworth.

The values I promote are values that sit at the heart of local government, a key part of the public sector which reaches deep into our communities, impacting the lived experiences of our residents.

In Richmond and Wandsworth Councils, where nearly two-thirds of our workforce are women, we see daily examples of dedication, compassion, and leadership. I am proud to be part of this amazing group of mothers, sisters, grandmothers, wives, partners, managers, leaders, friends, and colleagues who tirelessly serve these two beautiful and diverse London boroughs.

Reflecting on when I first joined UK local government, short of twenty years ago, I had questions about gender equality, breaking the glass ceiling, and whether this was taken seriously. I contemplated whether my gender, age, and ethnicity as an Eastern European would limit my career options. I have seen firsthand how the local government family has made great strides and continues to do so in promoting and sowing the seeds around the equality and inclusion of women in leadership positions.

However, as we celebrate the achievements and advances of women, it's also important to acknowledge that we still have a long way to go in terms of achieving true gender equality. We must continue to break down barriers that limit women's career options and ensure women have the same opportunities to excel as men.

There are still such incredible demands and expectations placed on women - homemakers, nurturers, educators, and excelling professionals. We must do more to promote and support women, particularly black and minoritised female leaders, to take on leadership roles. Creating an inclusive workplace where women can thrive is crucial and it is with policies, practices, and culture where we can significantly impact women's professional progress. We must foster a culture of openness, support, and kindness, where relationships matter, and leaders lead with love and compassion.

To survive in today's ever-changing and challenging global economy, we need to relentlessly and unapologetically invest in our biggest asset - our people. This means empowering women and men to excel as leaders and embrace their vision and contribution to leadership. Our male colleagues are our allies, promoting gender equity and supporting female colleagues. Women leaders play a critical role in strengthening leadership overall, and we must ensure they have equal opportunities to succeed.

Leadership is challenging and that is true for men and women. Despite the challenges women face in leadership positions, I want to emphasise that women can, should, and do thrive in these roles. For anyone considering furthering their career, I encourage you to pursue your passions and follow your dreams. Throughout my career, I've been fortunate to work with inspiring women and men who have coached, mentored, and instilled in me the passion I now nurture for the public sector.

Championing female leadership in the public sector

My three pieces of advice for aspiring female leaders:

- See yourself as equal, feel yourself as equal and challenge anything which makes you feel unequal.
- Be yourself, be authentic and be proud of who you are and what you do.
- Don't hold back. When you have done something amazing, speak about it.

Whilst the journey may be challenging you absolutely can achieve remarkable success and inspire others along the way, with determination and support, whilst staying true to yourself and your core values.

About Ana Popovici

Ana Popovici is the **Deputy Chief Executive** of the Richmond and Wandsworth Better Service Partnership, a unique shared staffing arrangement between two London boroughs and the **Executive Director of Children's Services** at the London Borough of Wandsworth.

With an international career spanning over twenty years across teaching, social work, national work and local government, Ana considers local government to be both an agent of change and an anchor of place, and this is exemplified by her position as lead officer for Wandsworth's London Borough of Culture 2025.

Beginning her career as a teacher, Ana transitioned to social work to focus on making a difference in the lives of those who most need support, change and empowerment. Before joining Wandsworth, she held senior positions in the London Borough of Hillingdon, Lincolnshire County Council and Cafcass, a non-departmental public body, with responsibility for operational services across a number of different regions across England.

Ana feels that her experience of coming to the UK from overseas, finding challenge and opportunity in the world's greatest capital city, provides insight and empathy for the lives of Londoners who have embarked upon their own journey.

For Ana, leading in Richmond and Wandsworth, is a great challenge and a fantastic opportunity due to its scale and its complexity and in terms of connecting 'with' so many communities – 'within' so many communities.

Looking with optimism to the future, in a world characterised by rapid change and uncertainty, Ana is unwavering in her commitment to listening to residents—our communities, our people, which for her remain at the forefront of leading with compassion, creativity and impact, whilst advocating for more women to take up leadership roles in local government.



Summary and conclusions

This report does not aim to be a comprehensive study of female leadership in public services – by design, our research was small-scale. Yet we hope it represents **an important step in fostering a deeper conversation about the realities, challenges, and opportunities for women in leadership roles**. The insights shared by survey respondents, as well as the inspiring case studies of PossAbilities (a pioneering all-female led social enterprise) and Ana Popovici's story (Deputy Chief Executive of the Richmond and Wandsworth Better Service Partnership), highlight the achievements of female leaders in public services. However, they also underscore the work still to be done.

Every organisation should take a hard look at itself and ask: Are we doing enough to support employees juggling roles as parents and carers? Are our pathways to leadership fair and transparent? Are we actively supporting and developing female talent? One of the clearest insights from our survey is that **women do not want to attain leadership roles simply because of their gender; they want to earn them based on their skills, experience, and ability to lead**. This underscores the need for public service organisations to ensure that gender is not a barrier – neither in perception nor practice – and that leadership opportunities are genuinely accessible to all.

At Mutual Ventures, diversity across all characteristics is a fundamental priority, particularly given our commitment to public services. While we are fortunate to have many talented female employees, **we recognise that we have more to do in order to have more diversity at the leadership level**. This commitment is embedded in our business plan and objectives.

One of the most powerful takeaways from our research was the importance of mentoring in fostering female leadership – particularly mentoring by women in senior positions. A quarter of our survey respondents identified this as a key enabler for progress. At Mutual Ventures, we are committed to supporting our female employees through development opportunities, maternity and health-related support, and structured mentoring. We are fortunate to have the guidance of our exceptional (female) non-executive directors and will continue to provide opportunities for women to learn, grow, and lead.

The path to gender equality in leadership is not about tokenism – it is about **ensuring that every woman with the talent and ambition to lead is given the opportunity to do so**. Progress is being made – both at Mutual Ventures and public sector organisations across the country, but the journey is far from over. **Real change will come through continuous reflection, action, and accountability**. By fostering an environment where women can thrive – where leadership is based on merit, where support structures are strong, and where diversity is truly valued – we can ensure that public services benefit from the full range of talent and perspectives they need to succeed.

The conversation does not end here. Let's continue to challenge, inspire, and push for the change that still needs to happen.

We hope this report sparks reflection and action.

Annex – deep dive analysis

Detailed sector analysis

The “motherhood penalty”



Deep dive – detailed sector analysis

The UK public sector workforce is made up of significantly more women than men when compared to the private sector. However, across different sectors within public services, the split becomes more varied, for example, 76% of NHS workers are women, but they only make up 42% of the judiciary and 12% of the armed forces³. It is, therefore, not surprising that the experiences of our respondents around gender bias, and how they perceive their organisations addressing it, varies depending on where they work.

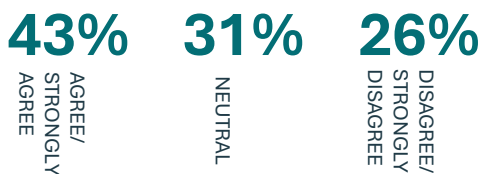
By examining the differences, we can gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women working in each sector and highlight the importance of tailored approaches to promoting gender diversity and addressing barriers to female leadership.

Local authorities

Local government is a critical source of employment for women, with around 858,000 women working for local authorities⁴. While respondents in local authorities often report a balanced gender representation in leadership roles it is still disproportionate to the number of women working in local government (74%)⁴.

Even within local government, there are significant variations in female leadership depending on location, with only 26% of councillors in North Ireland being women, compared to 52% in London as of last year⁵.

Women face additional barriers to leadership in my org.:



My organisation actively promotes gender equality:



Healthcare

Healthcare respondents show a mix of perceptions regarding gender diversity with some noting significantly more men in leadership roles. Out of the four sectors we looked at as part of this report, the NHS has the highest proportion of women making up its workforce at 76%³. However, here too the story repeats itself with women only holding 35% of senior positions⁶. This is also despite the fact that women have made up the majority of medical school students for the last decade⁷.

As part of a national conference aimed at supporting women in working in healthcare, a survey found that 56% of attendees felt there were not enough women in senior roles and from the same cohort 25% had been discouraged from applying for a senior position⁷.

Women face additional barriers to leadership in my org. * :



My organisation actively promotes gender equality * :



* This data analysis is based on a small number of respondents

Third sector

In contrast, respondents from the third sector tend to report a higher proportion of women in leadership roles. This may be influenced by the mission-driven nature of third sector organisations, which often prioritise inclusion as part of their core values (see page 13-14 for our interview with social enterprise PossAbilities CEO).

However, the reality of female representation at leadership level is more nuanced. A study by Pro Bono Economics found that while women hold 56% to 63% of CEO positions, they make up 68% of the workforce. Moreover, the number of CEOs drops significantly to 35% when it comes to the UK largest charities⁸.

“Women are drivers of so much of the good done by the nation’s charities, comprising two-thirds of the sector’s workforce... However, many of the levers of decision-making power in the sector reside predominantly in male hands.”

- Matt Whittaker, CEO of Pro Bono Economics

Women face additional barriers to leadership in my org.:

18% AGREE/ STRONGLY AGREE

64% NEUTRAL

18% DISAGREE/ STRONGLY DISAGREE

My organisation actively promotes gender equality:

76% AGREE/ STRONGLY AGREE

24% NEUTRAL

Women face additional barriers to leadership in my org*.:
AGREE/ STRONGLY AGREE

66%

DISAGREE/ STRONGLY DISAGREE

33%

My organisation actively promotes gender equality* :
AGREE/ STRONGLY AGREE

100%

* This data analysis is based on a small number of respondents

Central government

Respondents from central government sectors tend to report a higher proportion of men in leadership roles, reflecting what central government data tells us with 48.2% of women holding senior civil servant roles despite making up 54.5% of the workforce³. However, the portion of women in senior positions is trending upwards. At the start of 2025, of the sixteen Whitehall departments with a permanent secretary, half were run by women³.

Identified barriers to female leadership in central government include entrenched cultural attitudes, bias in recruitment or promotion processes, and lack of flexible working arrangements. Respondents call for broader policy changes and more significant cultural shifts to support female leadership.



Deep dive – the “motherhood penalty”

Women make up the majority of the local government workforce however, men still account for more than half of the leadership positions⁹. As more women are now progressing into higher education than men¹⁰, this continued disparity is attributable to factors other than simply who is most qualified: research suggests that the ‘motherhood penalty’ remains a contributing factor.

A study by *Understanding Society* found that women in heterosexual couples do four to eight hours of additional housework a week compared to their male partners. Additionally, it found that in 95% of such couples, mothers were responsible for more childcare compared to fathers¹¹.

The uneven expectations and workload for women at home, particularly for mothers, are playing a role in preventing women from pursuing the same opportunities as men in the workplace.

“It’s about women taking time off their career for families that then puts them behind for senior roles.” – survey respondent

Two contributing factors include:

Women are less likely to put themselves forward at work for promotion, or other opportunities to progress, as they try to balance their responsibilities at home.

12% of respondents specifically mentioned the impact of caring responsibilities as being seen as a barrier to career progression.

A study found that 31% of mothers stay in a job despite being able to earn more or progress elsewhere due to their current job’s flexibility¹².

Moreover, mothers, particularly single mothers, are treated negatively in the workplace, with 16% of mothers having faced discrimination based on their status as a working mother, rising to 22% of single mothers¹².

The opposite is true for men, with fathers experiencing the ‘fatherhood bonus’. Not only are they seen as more competent and perceptive after having a child, but they actually experience on average a 6% increase in their salary per child¹³.



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I believe that one of the greatest barriers for women in many job roles, not just leadership roles, is the dual role that many women have to take - in many families where both partners work, women still take on the vast majority of household responsibilities including childcare.

- survey respondent

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Deep dive – the “motherhood penalty”

How to overcome it?

To effectively address the entrenched bias and patriarchal values within our society, organisations must take proactive measures. This involves implementing meaningful steps at both operational and cultural levels to mitigate the potential negative impact of parenthood on a woman’s career. This cultural shift involves challenging and changing the underlying attitudes and biases that perpetuate gender inequality. Organisations must foster an environment in which policies introduced to support working mothers are not just available but are also normalised and encouraged.

“ **There needs to be a culture where working parents are seen as bringing valuable skills and resources to the workplace as opposed to being a challenge because of their additional responsibilities. - survey respondent** ”

Flexible hours

26% of respondents identified lack of flexible working arrangements as a factor contributing to barriers for women in leadership roles

By introducing genuine flexible working policies, including working part of the week from home, organisations can support those with caregiving responsibilities (usually women) to better balance their work and personal lives.

“Flexible working [is about] recognising that women are still the main caregivers whether of children or relatives.” –survey respondent

This flexibility allows more control over schedules and can therefore lead to increased career participation, lower levels of stress and feelings of guilt. This can open up new and more senior roles to working mothers.

It can also benefit organisations by attracting and retaining a more diverse workforce – a recent study found that 66% of the general working population view employers who offer family-friendly benefits more positively¹².

Parental leave

There is a significant discrepancy between maternity and paternity leave in the UK. While mothers are entitled to up to 52 weeks of maternity leave, most fathers are entitled to just two weeks of statutory leave - the least generous entitlement in Europe¹⁴.

While there is positive momentum with regards to maternity leave across the UK, the significant gap between what mothers and fathers are offered not only limits the time that new fathers get to spend with their children but also reinforces gender stereotypes of women staying at home with their children.

Increasing paternity and shared parental leave would benefit the organisation by boosting employee retention, increasing job satisfaction, and making it a more attractive place to work for men, particularly those from younger generations¹⁵. Additionally, it would positively impact opportunities for women at work.

The caveat

As flexible working has increased, and more companies have embraced hybrid models, these practices may have increased the burden of housework on women at a higher rate than men. Post-Covid, women with more flexible working arrangements have been taking on more of the routine housework as well as more ‘male-coded’ tasks such as DIY. Ultimately, increased flexibility comes with its own downside for women - one that needs to be addressed culturally as well as structurally¹¹.

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