

# FORWARD SISTERS!

## Local Women in Politics

### A Goal Achieved?

It is thanks to the efforts and sacrifices of the local women described here and many others who have left no memorial, that modern women – in this country at least- enjoy such a wealth of opportunity in education and career choice today. Is there still progress to be made?

#### Janet Setchfield (1927-2009)

Educated at Newarke Girls' Grammar School and Leicester Domestic Science College, Janet was the Grand Daughter of the Labour activist Annie Stretton. In 1970, she was elected as a Labour Councillor for North Braunstone. When local government suffered reorganisation in 1974, Janet was elected both to the Leicester Council and Leicestershire County Council. When she went on to serve as Chairman of the County Council 1982-1984, she was not only the first woman, but also the first Labour Councillor to do so. Whilst still serving, she was appointed High Bailiff of the City and went on in 1985 to be elected Lord Mayor. Her father, Thomas Rowland Hill had been Mayor in 1951, and Janet was the first daughter to follow in her father's footsteps in this way. She was also the first person to serve as Lord Mayor of Leicester and Chairman of the County Council! In 2010, she had the further honour of having a street named after her – Janet Setchfield Place.



#### Rosita Page, Chairman of Leicestershire County Council, 2013

It was not until 1936 that Leicestershire County Council welcomed its first lady member – Mrs Elizabeth Warner of Desford. Nearly eighty years later in 2013, there are thirteen women amongst the fifty five County Councillors, one of whom, Mrs Rosita Page, is Chairman.



Having been born and educated in Germany, Rosita has lived in Leicestershire for more than thirty years, teaching at Secondary Schools and Further Education Colleges. She was elected to Harborough District Council in 1999 and has represented Lutterworth on the County Council since 2005. She was Chairman of Harborough District Council in 2010. She is the fourth woman to serve as Chairman of the County Council.

Rosita made the early decision to concentrate on local politics rather than national because she wanted to enjoy family life. She has no regrets as she loves interacting with the community and balancing top tier politics with local needs. However, she will concede that it is still very difficult for women in politics, even in the twenty first century. Women have to work twice as hard to prove their worth and it is a constant struggle in what is still very much a man's world.

#### Mel Read

Imelda Mary Read, known as Mel Read, was elected as a Labour Member of the European Parliament in 1989, representing Nottingham and Leicestershire North West until 1999 when her constituency became the Leicester Euro Constituency. During her political career, Mel was Chair of the European Parliamentary Labour Party 1990-1992 and a Quaestor of the Parliament 1998-1999 (A quaestor looks after financial and administrative interests of members). She retired from politics in 2004 when she was elected president of the European Cervical Cancer Association.



#### Patricia Hewitt

Leicester had to wait until 1997 for its first female Member of Parliament. Australian-born Patricia Hewitt resigned from her post as general secretary of the National Council for Civil Liberties in 1983 in order to devote her time to 'groundwork' in her prospective constituency in Leicester. She failed to win the seat by 997 votes and moved on to become press officer and policy coordinator for Neil Kinnock.

After election in 1997 as MP for Leicester West, Patricia went on to serve as Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Minister for Small Businesses and E-Commerce and Secretary State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women. During her time, she was no stranger to controversy attracting headlines which accused her amongst many other things of being 'a man hater'. She retired in 2010 and was succeeded in Leicester West by Liz Kendall.



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