



# The Scottish Women's Convention

Response to the Independent Budget Review  
Panel re Public Spending Choices 2011-14

April 2010



## Introduction

The purpose of the Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is to communicate and consult with women in Scotland to influence public policy. Through the Convention's policy work, round table and celebratory events the SWC strives to have contact with women and relevant organisations. The SWC aims to provide an effective way of consulting with a diverse range of women in Scotland.

The Scottish Women's Convention has a network of over 300,000 women from relevant organisations throughout Scotland.

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**This paper provides a response by the Scottish Women's Convention to the Independent Budget Review: Initial Calls for Contributions.**

## Background

The purpose of the Independent Budget Review Panel is to inform public and Parliamentary debate in advance of the next UK Comprehensive Spending Review, which will cover the three years 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14, about the challenges and choices which will exist in a significantly constrained public spending environment, and to ensure that priorities can be set by Government and Parliament.

The review document states that under any reasonable assumption, the Scottish Government's Departmental Expenditure Limit budget (DEL) is likely to fall by around £1billion (3.6%) per year in real terms during the three years to 2013-14. The largest year on year reduction (of approx 5.2%) is forecast to occur in the first year 2011 -12.

## SWC Response

The SWC fully acknowledge that the impact of the global economic downturn will be felt for some time and that both the public sector and third sector in Scotland will be subject to a prolonged period of spending cuts which will adversely affect both jobs and services in the longer term.

Given the current financial climate the SWC welcome the actions of the Scottish Government in commissioning this independent review body. We hope contributions will ensure concise and informed evidence is available to the Government regarding equality issues across all policy areas and governance.

We would also strongly argue that on every level, men and women are in very different positions when considering fiscal policy and it is absolutely critical that this is considered when assessing budget priorities, challenges and choices. The SWC fully concur with the view of Professor Ailsa McKay<sup>1</sup>

*“The individual choices of men and women as ‘economic agents’ are effectively determined by a given set of structurally determined roles, responsibilities and expectations. The combined effect of these gendered social and cultural norms is that men and women occupy very different positions in both the paid and unpaid sectors of the economy.”*

Therefore, from the outset we wish to stress the importance of securing and safeguarding a sufficient equalities budget and crucially for the women’s agenda a vigorous gender budget analysis in each and every policy stream.

*“Government budgets are important mediators of gender inequality. The way that governments raise and spend money has the potential to reduce the inequalities that occur in families, communities, markets and business; or to amplify them”* (Professor Diane Elson, 2004).

The SWC have spoken extensively to women at grassroots level across Scotland. It has been made clear in the responses provided by our participants that service delivery by public sector bodies and other government funded agencies impact them in more diverse and direct ways than men. Our reports evidence specific barriers women face in numerous policy areas such as employment, housing, transport, education, health, childcare, family care and the justice system.

An illustration of the barriers includes:

- Housing – Bad housing has a serious effect on women’s health and their self confidence.
- Violence against Women – Even after increased publicity and successive zero tolerance campaigns violence against women is still unacceptably high. Women reported a disturbing lack of advocacy availability and dismay at the low rate of conviction for rape.
- Education and Employment – Long term social and cultural barriers continue to push women into low paying sectors of employment particularly women who suffer multiple deprivations.
- Childcare/Caring Being viewed as the primary carer in families curtails opportunity and progress in work and education for women and achievement of economic independence. A lack of affordable accessible childcare means work/benefit income tensions put women and consequently, as they make up the majority of single parents, their children further into poverty.
- Transport - Women and children in most areas are the main users of local public transport services and the dependability, cost and planning of integrated services are a core issue for women.

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<sup>1</sup> Recession and Recovery- What’s Gender Got To Do With It? 2010 STUC Congress Programme Page 11.

Feedback from women overwhelmingly supports the view that as service users and employees of our public services women represent the majority. As a consequence of this fact our public services must work for women, be accountable to them and listen to what women say.

When participants at SWC events discussed issues in relation to the local or individual impacts of the economic crisis unanimous agreement was recorded that budgeting considerations must show real transparency and demonstrate compliance with the public sector quality duties. Furthermore they said that gender impact analysis was not a “good times” embellishment to these fundamental legal requirements.

Any withdrawal of financial support can have unintended and unforeseen consequences. Already too many women in Scotland suffer inequality and exclusion as a result of disability, race or poverty for example but additionally because of a lack of robust gender based assessment in service provision and funding. The SWC believe that it is imperative that women who are already vulnerable or marginalised due to complex conditions are not further disempowered through a lack of gender impact assessment in financial planning by either the Government or Local Authorities.

The SWC believe Scotland is very much in need of a fundamental assessment of the overall social return benefits of budgeting based on in depth gender analysis across all policies if their aim is to achieve a better Scotland by increasing sustainable economic growth through cohesion, productivity and participation.

The Single Outcome Agreements between the Scottish Government have questionably allowed Local Authorities to move funding from a number of essential services for women and savings should not be made under the guise of “priorities” without gender impact assessments being carried out. Robust direction must be provided to local authorities by the Scottish Government in meeting equality legislation against budget dispersal.

Women also registered concern about public service and third sector jobs. Women on the whole occupy positions in lower pay bands and any potential cuts or service redesign potentially has an immediate detrimental impact on the long term ability of these women to support themselves. Employment barriers already faced by women put them in a much more vulnerable position in any economic downturn and mean they are frequently first to feel the effects any recession.

For example,

- A continuing substantial pay gap particularly of part time workers the vast majority of whom are women.
- Pension provision inequality.
- The predominance of women in low wage sector employment such as caring, catering and cleaning.

- Despite legislation to address the issue a lack of employer commitment to and male employee take up of flexible working opportunities and socio/economic assumptions that unpaid caring does not contribute to the economy.

Overall the SWC would like to stress that budget constraints should not simply focus on efficiency savings through cheaper alternatives and procurement. There must be an integral awareness that cutting services from 'equality groups' or overall equality budgets will have a significant negative impact of individuals accessing and providing those services and for women these are often life line services or valuable community improvement initiatives. Therefore it is essential users are consulted in any service budget planning.

In conclusion the SWC fully support the contributions of the Scottish Trade Union Council and the Scottish Women Budget Group to the Finance Committee Budget Strategy Phase Consultation and this Independent Budget Review Commission.

**The SWC are aware that their budget allocation will be affected by any decisions made by the Government on Equality spending. We intend to prepare for this by reviewing the following working practices;**

- The sourcing of different venue types for our events.
- Reviewing programme timings and catering sources to reduce catering costs.
- Participation in more partnership events.
- Geographical awareness of event locations to plan for one trip travel costs to several event locations in the same area.
- Improve efficiency of administrative costs such printing, mailing and event promotion.

April 12th 2010

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All SWC reports and consultation responses can be accessed on our website  
<http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/what-we-do.asp>



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