



Scottish Women's Convention

# Thurso Roadshow Report

The Pentland Hotel, Thurso  
Tuesday 23rd August 2011  
(5.30pm - 7.30pm)

The Scottish Women's Convention believe public sector cuts are having a profound impact on women.

Our 2011 Roadshow programme ensures women in Scotland have an opportunity to express their views on the effects of spending cuts on them, their families and communities.

Agnes Tolmie  
Chair SWC

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.

## What Key Services should be protected and why?

Participants expressed concern over the closure of major employers in the area, specifically the local Passport Office and the threat of closure surrounding the Tax Office. The centralisation of

*“The Tax Office is one of the biggest employers in the area and the centralisation of services is making life very difficult.”*

these services is having an impact on the women in the area, not only in relation to additional cost and distance to travel when requiring use of these services, but also by the number of jobs lost from the redeployment of the Tax Office.

### Healthcare

There is a lack of consistency with the patient transport service which is inconvenient for those requiring its use. Patients with appointments in the morning must wait until the last patient of the day has been seen in order to be taken home. The use of this service is necessary due to the poor public transport provision which does not take into account hospital appointment times.

Travelling distance and poor transport means patients requiring to stay in hospital are *“languishing with no visitors”* which adds to the isolation at a vulnerable time.

Local healthcare provision is problematic, especially in relation to maternity services. In some cases, air ambulances are used to uplift women in labour. Whilst this obviously allows them to reach hospitals quicker, it also means women are giving birth alone with no support network available.

The elderly are the most isolated in the community, with care being inadequate to the extent that *“the person delivering the mail is often the person who spends the most time with them.”*

The level of healthcare and support provision in the area is not acceptable. Day Care Centres and inclusion initiatives are required to ensure that rural women are not penalised in relation to healthcare support.

*“We sometimes feel like we are being punished for living outwith central Scotland. We need the same levels of service if not more.”*

### Local Services

*“Just because we stay rural doesn't mean that we have to do without the small things that make life better.”*

The importance of keeping the town *“alive”* by equipping it adequately was stressed. Suggestions included

- ⇒ Maintaining local library services as they are regarded as a well-used local hub.
- ⇒ Extending the mobile cinema services to cover more rural areas.
- ⇒ Protecting public toilets as well as extending their opening hours to support the local community and visitor trade.

### Transport

Poor road conditions, further damaged by the huge lorries which travel on them, are not well maintained by Local Authority contractors. Tourism and investment suffer as a result as well the community as a whole.

Poor public transport timetabling results in women being unable to use free bus passes. Instead, expensive taxis are being used in order to access appointments or local amenities including shops and recreational activities.

Daycare centres charge service users for transport use - including those with concession passes.

## What cuts do you believe are having the most detrimental impact on Women?

There was general agreement that the cuts are having a disproportionate effect on women, and that services which women find vital are being discontinued.

### Education

Funding constraints are having a detrimental impact on local schools by directly effecting the job security of teachers as well as subject choice for older pupils. Due to falling numbers of pupils and lack of teachers, subjects are being removed from school timetables, limiting the choices available for young people.

### Healthcare

Funding for primary healthcare and hospital provision adversely affects women in the area. Caithness General Hospital is based in Wick. With transport issues and limited maternity services, women are concerned that cuts are jeopardising their access to essential services.

### Employment Opportunities

The current shortage of jobs in the area means that investment in the community is minimal. Moreover, the consistent threat of closure by employers in surrounding areas, such as Douneray, creates an atmosphere of discontent. Employment opportunities for women are minimal with lack of registered childcare and support facilities further hindering their participation in the local economy.

*"We are in danger of becoming a community of either the elderly or the unemployed."*

Overall there is lack of opportunity in the area. With reducing numbers of people living and working in the town, there has been a reduction in key local services. Without these services, there will be no long term investment.

**It has been suggested by the UK Coalition Government that a 'Spirit of Activism' should be adopted by society. How do you see this idea effecting women?**

Participants were not opposed to the principles of volunteering. They paid credit to those from local Community Councils who are making key decisions on behalf of locals on a voluntary basis.

However, the idea of society relying on the goodwill of others to function effectively was opposed.

*"There has to be paid jobs for people to stay in communities and for communities to grow and aspire."*

The economic effects of volunteering were also discussed. The focus on volunteering was considered to be a cost cutting measure by the UK Government and an attempt to rely on untrained people doing jobs worthy of paid professionals.

Lack of Income Tax and National Insurance contributions by volunteers means an absence of money going into the economy and thus back into local services.

## What can the Scottish Government now do to provide assistance to women in Scotland?

- ⇒ More consideration of the distances travelled when living in rural areas. These distances relate to hospital visits, shopping trips, and the accessing of local services.
- ⇒ Reinvest and realise that the economy cannot grow through unemployment. People need to spend money to reinvigorate the economy. Encourage people to stay, visit and invest in the communities.
- ⇒ Speak directly with the women of Scotland in order to hear what directly affects them. This would ensure a desired *“less talk and more action”* policy.

## What recommendations would you make to the Scottish Government to make a difference in your area?

This question evoked a number of key issues for women living in Thurso and the following key recommendations were made:

- ⇒ More focus on job creation, especially in rural Scotland.
- ⇒ Creation of mobilised services such as physiotherapists and dentists.
- ⇒ Stop outsourcing local services.
- ⇒ Better roads and transport.
- ⇒ Provisions for off shore workers, this could include extended use of the heliport in Wick.
- ⇒ Address the rising cost of transport and consider the expense experienced by those travelling to Inverness to work or appointments.

**The SWC would like to thank the women who attended the event and those who contributed their views by phone and email for their valuable input.**

### Scottish Women’s Convention (SWC)

By consulting with women throughout Scotland, the SWC is able to influence public policy. Listening to women provides us with unique views for responding to Government consultations and other policy issues.

We need **YOUR** help. By using **YOUR** voice, along with other women in Scotland, **YOU** are able to have an impact on key policy decisions which effect your day-to-day life.

To find out more about our work,  
Check our website:

[www.scottishwomensconvention.org](http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org)

Or find us on **Facebook** or **Twitter**

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