



Wick Roadshow Report

Wick Assembly Rooms
Wednesday 24th August 2011

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?

It was made clear, from the outset, that the recent wave of public sector cuts is having an adverse effect on women across Scotland. The cuts are damaging local amenities and service provision must be protected as much as possible, especially support and crisis services.

Education

Funding for education must be maintained, especially with competition in the employment market. Basic numeracy and literacy skills need to be taught and monitored in schools. For this to be effective, there is a need to focus on the teacher pupil ratio within schools as well as subject choice. It was highlighted that in rural schools, such as in Wick, the pupil age and ability ranges can be very diverse, proving difficult for teachers to manage. Training and funding for educational needs to support children and teachers are required.

“Education reflects everything – we need to get it right for our children first.”

Furthermore, extra curricular funding is required to ensure pupils enjoy the opportunity of a well rounded educational experience - the cutting of music tuition and art specialists in school is wholly opposed. Too much emphasis and focus on academic results could adversely affect the experiences pupils have at school as well as their potential and future opportunities.

Healthcare

All aspects of healthcare provision need to be protected. Mental health issues require a focus and sufferers should not be regarded as *“a hidden group within society”*. Drop-in centres need to be maintained as well a re-examination the rules for referring a patient with mental health issues.

Funding for care of the elderly must be preserved. This area of healthcare is viewed as *“too easy to cut”*. Home care provision is essential but is currently not meeting the needs of service users and must be improved. Changes in personnel and limited / reducing time available with a client are stretching resources. The lack of communication when planning and providing care increases the stress on those employed within the profession, predominantly women.

Local services, such as the LauraAndy Day Care Centre, are to be praised, however there are concerns regarding the future of other local health care services. There is a current threat of closure for Thurso Hospital, impacting on Caithness General Hospital situated in Wick. Although the current A&E in Thurso has limited resources, those requiring immediate medical attention may have to travel 20 miles to Wick in the future.

The financial burden as well as time and distance travelled to other hospitals, such as Inverness, make the journey prohibitive for attending appointments or visiting patients.

Transport

There is an urgent need to preserve transport links in rural areas. There has been an improvement in the *“in town services”* but this has had an adverse impact on the links between rural communities.

A change in infrastructure and service provision would allow more flexibility for rural commuters and could also provide a more relaxed and comfortable journey for those travelling from Thurso/Wick to Inverness (a journey of approximately 4 hours by train and 3.5 hours by bus). These services need to be improved in order to justify the ever increasing fares.

“Rural transport is just a nightmare. The timetable does not allow enough time to spend in the centre of town. There isn’t even a direct bus to Inverness meaning journeys are longer and more expensive.”

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

Cuts in education budgets are limiting choices for young people as well as curtailing the subject choice available. There is an existence of gender streaming in some schools leading to a lack of opportunity for young women.

Healthcare

Concerns were raised that the availability of midwifery services could again lead to further isolation of rural women. There are limited maternity services available in Wick and many women have to travel to Inverness for ante-natal appointments.

There is a distinct lack of health visitors due to retirements. Fewer referrals are being made to this support service resulting in a loss of opportunity for early intervention when it comes to health issues.

“Less professional visiting means more isolation with consequent and additional problems.”

Employment Opportunities

Lack of investment in the area due to public sector cutbacks is very apparent.

Job centres vacancies and the employment market as a whole offer increased opportunities for men rather than women. Lack of affordable, accessible childcare, which offers the flexibility and support needed in finding work in a depressed job market, is not available to women. Funding for local childcare services is being cut. Poor transport links and the cost of travelling prevent women sourcing work outwith their local community.

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?

Volunteering is a major aspect of our modern day society and most of it is done by women. Frustration was displayed at the UK Government’s renewed focus on a volunteering requirement.

Issues raised in relation to this included

- ⇒ transport and coordination in rural areas
- ⇒ difficulties for those requiring childcare.

“Volunteering should be about something added on and not an essential.”

Some women have no additional time or resources required to volunteer.

“Forced volunteering” and its dangers were discussed. Volunteering can prove beneficial for some but not for everyone. Volunteering should be about acquiring skills and promoting self confidence rather than being a cover for cost cutting and reducing service provision.

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

- ⇒ More resources and funding for care of the elderly.
- ⇒ Note that cuts affect women on low pay in rural areas more.
- ⇒ Address the hidden problem of alcohol by an educational approach and innovative school programmes. Early years intervention should be treated as an important aspect to the problem with funding made available to support initiatives.
- ⇒ Provide an increased focus on parenting skills through projects and stronger partnership with educational establishments.
- ⇒ Deeper examination of the media's celebrity culture and its influence on society, especially in relation to children and young people.

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

- ⇒ Maintain educational and creative arts funding, especially aesthetic subjects providing social and health benefits throughout a woman's life.
- ⇒ Better funding and organisation of mental health services.
- ⇒ Increased funding for care of the elderly.
- ⇒ More assistance with childcare costs. The Government need to address this issue before a generation of women is forced to stay at home.
- ⇒ Provide affordable and organised local transport.
- ⇒ Maximise local infrastructure in terms of road, air and rail.

"Maximising infrastructure would bring jobs as well as people wishing for life experience to Caithness."

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.

Feedback comments from women who participated at the Wick event.

Very interesting and informative. Well worth attending.

Great opportunity to network with other people.

"Thanks for coming. No one really takes an interest in what happens to women here."

During the visit to Wick, SWC staff also met with staff at local voluntary sector organisations. By visiting projects, staff were able to introduce the work of the SWC and build networks in this rural area.

Projects visited -

Caithness Voluntary Group

Highland Council Service Point

Caithness Partnership Ltd

Highland & Islands Enterprise event at the Norseman Hotel, Wick

Rural Transport

Community Care Forum

Volunteering Highland

Ethnic Minority Network

Working for Families

Food for Thought, Caithness

Deaf Care

Visual Impairment Services Sensory Centre

The SWC would like to thank those who took time to meet with us and those who took our leaflets and literature to pass on to other networks. Your help and support is very much appreciated.

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:

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

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