THE SCOTTISH WOMEN’S CONVENTION AIMS TO:

♦ Enable women to influence policy in Scotland.
♦ Ensure that issues important to women are considered at all stages of the policy making process.

CHAIR’S REPORT

With the help of our valued supporters and volunteers we have achieved excellent engagement with women throughout Scotland, from Glasgow to the North East, and on to Shetland. 2019 is another year in which we have demonstrated how essential the work of the SWC is. We have captured women’s voices from the successful conferences focussed on a variety of prevalent issues: the Menopause, Housing & Homelessness, The Justice System, and Poverty. We heard from women with direct and lived experiences, facilitated discussions on priorities and considered what needs to be done to bring about meaningful change at a local, national and international level.

SWC STAFF

Evelyn Fraser
Development Manager

Caroline Thomson
Staff Support Manager

Ann Scullion
Administration Assistant

Lorna Kettles
Events and Policy Advisor (Until July)

Shairi Bowes
Events and Policy Advisor

Mary Beth Graham
Events and Policy Advisor

SWC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Agnes Tolmie (Chair)

Elspet Angus

Suzanne Conlin

Sarah Cumming

Patricia Donnelly

Giri Polubothu

DEVELOPMENT MANAGER’S REPORT

The SWC staff team has seen some changes this year as we said farewell to Lorna Gilfillan, and are delighted to welcome Mary Beth Graham to the team as our new Events and Policy Advisor.

Once again, this has been a very busy year where we have documented all contributions offered at SWC events, and recorded statements from women in the many communities and organisations we engaged with, to ensure we truly reflect women’s wider experiences. This documentation is instrumental in our mission to improve public policy and seek positive developments for all women. Planning is now underway for 2020, with a full plan of activities, focussing on the growing concerns of women on key policy areas.
ROADSHOWS

This year’s Roadshow Programme saw the SWC travel to engage with women throughout Scotland including events spanning the North East and a range of areas within Glasgow. Participants brought forth a variety of issues that impact on women at both a national and local level including:

- Lack of flexible childcare.
- A rise in addiction issues.
- The lack of housing availability.
- The impact of the closure of crucial public services.

Feedback was very positive with many women attending an SWC event for the first time. The use of the website and social media were the main ways in which women found out about events. Word of mouth and networking were also successful ways of encouraging attendance.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

On Saturday 9 March, over 380 women from throughout Scotland attended the annual SWC International Women’s Day celebrations in the Scottish Parliament. The theme was:

“In Celebration of Twenty Years of the Scottish Parliament.”

Speakers included Nicola Sturgeon MSP - First Minister of Scotland; Ayesha Hazarika – Broadcaster and Political Commenter; Harriette Campbell—ACWA; Yvonne Strachan-CBE; Former Deputy Director, Scottish Government; Hannah Blythn – Welsh Assembly; Paula Brennan-Trade Unionist. Actor Elaine C. Smith, Baroness Annabel Goldie and Christina McKelvie, Minister for Older People and Equalities also participated. An evening reception, sponsored by Thompsons Solicitors followed the proceedings in the Debating Chamber. This gave women the opportunity to network. Feedback confirms that women enjoy the Scottish Parliament building. It provides a unique, relaxed and informal meeting place to celebrate International Women’s Day.

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW)

The priority theme for 2019 was -

“Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.”

A report of the event is available from the SWC website. The SWC continues to be actively involved with UK women’s organisations as part of the CSW NGO Alliance and CSW NGO Core Group which meets with UK Government officials and politicians.
Shetland
- Extremely high cost of living including elevated food and fuel prices
- Increase in use of zero hours contracts in employment
- Ongoing problems and delays with universal credit
- Unique problems to the islands, often little understood in a national context
- Lack of internet connectivity
- Lack of provision in public transport

North East Scotland (Highlands)
- Shortage in provision of public transport in more rural areas
- Ongoing problems with Universal Credit and other forms of social security
- A rise in mental health issues with substantial referral waiting times for women and girls
- Challenges in recruitment of school teaching staff
- A lack of internet connectivity, most notably in more ruralised areas
- Inaccessibility to health services due to centralisation

Govan
- Lack of flexible childcare in the area for working mothers
- Community hub for women to access information and local services required
- More focus on health and wellbeing from early years for children
- Lack of capabilities and resources in schools for supporting children
- High expense of public transport for local women
- Need more custom built social housing and affordable amenities

Maryhill
- Unaffordability of public transport
- Rerouting of crucial bus services with little public consultation
- Social security sanctioning due to distance to nearest Job Centre Plus
- Increase in foodbank usage and lack of affordable, healthy options when buying food
- The need for an increase in new social housing builds and upgrades to older ones
- More education on the plight of refugees

Ardrossan
- Lack of support for victims of sexual assault
- Problems with social housing and trying to obtain suitable properties
- The need for accessible information about where women can find services and support
- Poor public transport schedules and links out with main towns
- Prevalence of mental health problems and lengthy waiting times
- A rise in addiction issues within local communities

Castlemilk
- Problems surrounding the social security system
- Closure of crucial services for the community
- Excess of jobs offering precarious employment and zero hours contracts
- Crucial requirement for a major supermarket to the area
- Lack of joined up support for housing issues
- Absence of early intervention for mental health problems
WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES OF MENOPAUSE
The SWC held an event in February focusing on women’s lived experiences of the menopause. This conference brought together women from a wide range of backgrounds and highlighted how little this topic has been discussed.
Menopause covers much more than just a physical transition. It impacts on every aspect of women’s lives, both individually and collectively. In holding this conference, the SWC wanted to identify key priorities for change directly from the women who have knowledge and experience of the menopause.
The Scottish Women’s Convention will continue to explore how we can add value to the argument and help alleviate the stigma attached to this time in a woman’s life. We will host as many events as possible, speaking directly with women to hear personal experiences, including ideas to change and improve the current system in a way that will work for the women that need help the most. Questions discussed on the day included:

- What support is required from employers?
- What information, support and advice should be given to women?

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS
The SWC undertook a programme of work to actively engage with women around housing and homelessness in Scotland. This was launched by a Conference the previous year with a work plan including roundtables and roadshow events as well as a Conference in June 2019 to conclude this vital topic.
We have heard from a large number of women detailing their struggles around housing. This has included contributions from questionnaires, consultations and roadshows. The SWC is extremely grateful to all those who shared their own experience - some of which has been extremely traumatic.
The work uncovered a huge range of issues that impact on women from hidden homelessness to sex for rent. The lack of access to a safe and private space severely limits women’s options and leaves them at higher risk of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The SWC will continue to bring women together, to raise awareness about the issues around housing and homelessness and to start discussions around the topic.
CONFERENCES

WOMEN AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

The ways in which women find their lives impacted by justice, or the lack of it, can interconnect with many other aspects of their lives. The justice system affects women in acutely different ways and the SWC have heard of the distress and trauma they have experienced within the current system.

A Conference held in October brought together women to hear about a range of issues. This included the prevalence of imprisonment for women due to poverty related crimes and the experiences of women who have suffered assault.

The SWC uncovered a wealth of issues related to women's experiences of the justice system including the need for better access to services, ending the need for corroboration and the not proven verdict in Scotland.

WHAT DOES POVERTY LOOK LIKE?

The SWC continues to hear about the devastating impacts of the austerity agenda and continuous welfare reforms which disproportionately affect women and their families. Therefore, we decided to hold a Conference on these topics to illustrate the vast effect that causes of poverty have on women in our country.

In order to focus on key areas, the Conference heard from speakers working in a wide range of areas including the increase in food bank use, the Period Dignity Campaign and the work of the Scottish Government to combat poverty.

Attendees were invited to put questions to the panel and make their own contributions about poverty in their areas. The SWC has followed this work up by gaining real life stories of women and their issues when experiencing poverty in its many forms.
CONSULTATIONS

The Scottish Parliament Equalities and Human Rights Committee Call for Views: Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Bill.

The Scottish Government Consultation: Proposals for a Job Grant.


Low Pay Commission: Low Pay Commission Consultation.

Scottish Parliament Private Members Bill: Proposed Wheelchairs (Short Term Access) (Scotland) Bill.

Scottish Parliament Private Members Bill: Proposed Fair Rents (Scotland) Bill.


Scottish Affairs Committee Call for Evidence: Welfare in Scotland.


UK Government Consultation Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: Legal Protections under the Equality Act 2010.


Scottish Parliament Local Government and Communities Committee Call for Views: Period Products (Free Provision) Scotland Bill.

Scottish Parliament Justice Committee Call for Views: Children (Scotland) Bill.

Scottish Government Call for Views on the Victim Statement Scheme.

UK Government Consultation on The Good Work Plan: Proposals to Support Families.

Copies of reports from SWC roadshows, conferences and consultation responses are available to download from our website, www.scottishwomensconvention.org

EVIDENCE SESSIONS

The SWC has been invited to attend a number of evidence sessions and steering groups.

The organisation is also actively involved in Cross Party Groups around women’s Health, Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sectarianism.
THANK YOU!

The SWC extends thanks to:

Thompsons Solicitors for sponsorship of IWD Evening Reception.
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Unite the Union (Finance and Legal)
Wylie and Bisset, Chartered Accountants.

Last, but not least, all of our volunteers and supporters.
Your contribution is always greatly appreciated!

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