

# Govan Roundtable Report

**Mental  
Health**

**Benefits**

**Low  
Paid**

**Disability**

**Living  
Wage**

**Sanctions**

**Council  
Tax**

**Caring**

**Equal  
Pay**

**Schools**

**Welfare  
Reform**

**Friday 11th Sept, 2017.**

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

**email: [info@scottishwomensconvention.org](mailto:info@scottishwomensconvention.org)**

**or call 0141 339 4797**



**@swcwomen**

**or find us on**



# Introduction

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) visited the Pearce Institute in Govan on 11th of September 2017, meeting local women to talk about issues which are important to them. The SWC holds a number of these events throughout the year in different communities across Scotland. The informal structure provides a safe and comfortable environment in which women can hold discussions in a relaxed setting.

Many themes emerged throughout the roundtable to highlight the strong sense of community identity within the Govan area. Outreach groups such as "Tea in the Pot" work as a drop in and support service for women. However, lack of funding for groups such as this put them at risk of closure. These are extremely valuable community commodities which are seen as offering a lifeline, women are referred by their GP as a stress relief.

The views of women in attendance will be used to influence policy at both a Scottish and UK government level. Local women hold an extremely important place within our society that is often underestimated. It is vital that their voices do not go unheard within Scotland.

Social security worries, increasing digitalisation and issues relating to community were all raised by the women in attendance. The SWC would like to extend a warm thanks to Gail Patterson, Alliance Healthcare, and all the women participating in the event.



## Key Issues for Women in Govan

### Social Security and Employment

The continuous rise in the cost of living has meant that many in the area are struggling to make ends meet. Whether through social security or low wages, a number of women within the community are reporting on rising usage of local food banks. Whilst these are seen by many as showing "*community spirit*" and togetherness, women were vocal on the lack of a viable solution for this epidemic in the twenty first century.

*"This didn't happen ten years ago. It's shameful that those with the power to change this do absolutely nothing."*

*"There's so much pressure for all this stuff to be online. Some people just don't have the resources."*

The numerous barriers to gaining social security are vast and extremely stressful. Discussion focused on the numerous medical assessment barriers that are put in place. This has only intensified since the introduction of such tests by contracted private companies. Women "*build themselves up*" for the process only to get knocked down. They then have to go through a lengthy appeal procedure – often just to get what they were rightly due in the first place.

*“The amount of money they spend on the appeals and tribunals fees process surely is more expensive than actually just paying the correct amount in the first place.”*

Many are left questioning the feasibility of these assessments and the amount of money spent on them when a simple note from a doctor they have had for years could be all it should take. This, however, is rarely taken into consideration leading to increased stress for those claiming benefits.

*“Surely, even just for efficiency’s sake, it would be easier to use your own GP who has known you for years?”*

*“Information from tribunals and the letters you get through for appeals are filled with jargon which you can hardly understand and makes you feel intimidated.”*

The stress is seen as *“unbelievable”*. Many spoke about why a system that is meant to be there for the public good has left the most vulnerable feeling so hopeless, with no way to make ends meet for themselves and families. This is much harder on women. Single parents struggling to cope due to childcare and part time employment or women who are often the sole providers within a household. It was felt that *“scare tactics”* were often used by the Department of Work and Pensions when contacting women.

*“When they make a mistake it’s not a big deal. But when it’s you, you get sanctioned.”*

*“There’s a real lack of information around social security, especially when it’s constantly changing. You just don’t know what’s happening or what you’re entitled to.”*

Women discussed the stigmatisation of those who are unable to work due to a number of factors, both from other people and the job centre. When being sent there, they have been told simply to ‘get a job’, regardless of circumstances. Staff can often be uninformed and women feel treated as a statistic rather than an individual. These factors have led to *“extreme”* tolls on mental health due to the stress. It was also acknowledged, however, that there are job centre staff members who go out of their way to help under extreme pressure, timescales and targets.

*“Who’s going to employ me? I’m 60.”*

*“A lot of what the job centres do now is in call centres. It’s not like years ago when you would know the people that worked there and they knew your specific issues.”*

Having to call and wait to get through to helplines is costly. This process is further exacerbated through the usage of mobile phones. People tend to use these due to the high cost of home telephone line rental fees. To make matters worse, after speaking with someone at the DWP, women have commented that they end up being sent to access information from a website. This brings the additional problem of the costs associated with internet access.

*“They expect you to just have internet.”*

*“Poorer people get charged more really for everything.”*

“Money Matters”, a money advice charity situated within the Govan area is seen as a huge help to those under financial strain due to the likes of these social security and employment issues. However, it is acknowledged that the organisation is under tremendous pressure and struggling to cope with the number of cases it is taking on.

*“What is there that can help you is invaluable to people here. But places are swamped.”*

*“You can wait up to five hours. At one point, you were waiting six weeks for an appointment. There’s just not enough resources.”*

A number of women floated the idea of a community internet café being set up in the local area. This could support those who are most in need. Given the sheer number of applications that have to be done online, women were vocal in the benefits that an operation like this could have within the community.

There have also been a number of bank closures within the district such as the local RBS and TSB. This is making it much harder for those on lower incomes to access facilities that they need in order to manage their money effectively. Online banking is usually given as their only alternative. A lack of internet access, however, makes this difficult. Using this for the likes of social security and wages can be frustrating with some feeling that the DWP is offering no alternatives and often leaving them feeling *“punished”*.

*“You get letters from the DWP, which can be very threatening, telling you to open a bank account but then banks are closing.”*

## Transport

Many women within the community feel that there is room for improvement when it comes to public transport. Buses were the main topic, with many feeling that there were lengthy waiting times. This is particularly heightened in the evenings with many services stopping or becoming less frequent after 6pm. Many women fear for their personal safety standing alone at a bus stop or having to plan routes or additional buses, this often prevents women from travelling at night.

The subway, which has a stop in Govan, has to be paid for at a concessionary rate whilst buses are free, making them the most economically viable option for many women.

*“If buses change, they don’t inform you.”*

*“Public transport can be really expensive if you don’t have any help.”*

There is also a problem with links to the likes of supermarkets. The nearest food stores tend to be quite small and often expensive for healthy food, meaning many opt to buy cheaper, junk food.

The new Queen Elizabeth University Hospital has raised a number of issues for local women. Whilst many have praised the opening of the hospital and the work of the staff, there are also a number of concerns regarding the impact within the local community. Many feel it has “*restructured*” everything and led to a host of complications. One of the most serious issues is a rise in the number of road accidents due to the increase of traffic as an effect of the hospital opening.

*“It has ripped the heart and soul out of this community. I understand the benefits but I don't think they took our community into account.”*

*“It has had a huge negative impact on Govan.”*

## What are the key priorities for your local area?

- Another community hall
- More shops or a shopping centre
- A local supermarket
- More buses within the area
- Our banks to stay open
- A health centre with everything integrated where the likes of councillors and advisors can meet with the community.
- A place to go to find out what's happening within the area.

## Conclusion

The SWC would like to thank the women in Govan who took the time to talk about the issues which are important to them, their families and communities as a whole. It is essential that the voices of women in Scotland continue to be heard at all levels of policy and decision making. Discussions held by the SWC throughout Scotland, will ensure that this happens.

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy.

This is achieved in a number of different ways - through roadshow, round table, conference and celebratory events. Following each event a report is compiled and issued to women who attend and relevant policy and decision makers.

The SWC uses the views of women to respond to Scottish and UK Government consultation papers.