



Scottish Parliament Elections Hustings Event

Saturday 6th February

**Hilton Grosvenor Hotel,
Glasgow**

“Women need to have their voices heard as part of the campaign for the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections. They are the cornerstone of communities – both socially and economically. Political parties need to engage with women and listen to their concerns on a range of issues which are important to them, their families and communities as a whole. This event has ensured that those attending are able to raise questions and seek answers to the issues which matter the most to women of all ages, from throughout Scotland.”

Agnes Tolmie
Chair, SWC

www.scottishwomensconvention.org

Introduction

As part of the 2014 Referendum debate, the Scottish Women's Convention held a series of events throughout Scotland, which gave local women the opportunity to ask questions directly to both campaigns. The SWC is organising similar events around the Scottish Parliament elections in 2016. By bringing representatives of the six main political parties in Scotland together, women will be able to ask questions which are important to them leading up to the May vote.

The first event was held at the Hilton Grosvenor Hotel, Glasgow, on Saturday 6th March. Representatives from five of Scotland's main political parties set out manifesto commitments and key policies for the upcoming Scottish Parliament elections. Women were able to ask questions relevant to them, their families and communities across Scotland. The session was chaired by Morag Alexander OBE.

The SWC would like to thank all of the speakers, as well as the women, for giving up their Saturday morning to attend.



Annie Wells - Scottish Conservative Party

Annie is standing for election in the Glasgow Provan constituency and is second on the list for her party in the Glasgow region. Annie outlined a number of key Conservative policies and ideas for the upcoming Holyrood elections.

- More needs to be done to increase women's participation in politics. There needs to be a recognition of the reasons why women are less likely to become involved in politics and stand for election. It is also vital that more women get out and vote.
- Areas such as computer science and mechanical engineering show the biggest gender gap in favour of men. More needs to be done to encourage women to become involved in these roles, because not doing so enforces outdated gender stereotypes. The gap in these sectors must be narrowed. There should be a sense that anyone can enrol in any course, regardless of their gender.
- There needs to be a focus on getting women into these subjects from a young age. Girls are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects. There needs to be a point where it is not surprising to see female physicists, computer scientists and engineers. There can never be too many positive role models for young women to emulate.
- The Scottish Conservatives believe that hard work should pay, no matter what walk of life you are from. The Scottish Conservatives want full gender equality, which means reducing the gender pay gap, further work to achieve access to family planning and ensuring no disadvantage to women in the workplace.

Martha Wardrop, Scottish Green Party

Martha is a councillor for Glasgow's Hillhead Ward. Martha outlined a number of key Scottish Green Party (SGP) policies and ideas for the elections in May.

- The party will challenge barriers for women so they can take up Modern Apprenticeships (MAs). These continue to reflect outdated gender stereotypes, drawing young women into poorer paid work. SGP will encourage women to enter non-traditional courses such as engineering, and for experienced women in these sectors to act as ambassadors. They will also continue to push for training and employment which offers decent wages.
- The SGP are seeking action to reduce class sizes, provide support for children with additional support needs and address teachers workload. Scotland can close the attainment gap but in order to do so, there needs to be investment in teacher recruitment and training, as well as additional support needs. This disproportionately affects children from deprived backgrounds.
- The party oppose and condemn the UK Government Trade Union Bill, which restricts workers fundamental rights to organise and bargain collectively.
- The SGP support the restoration of local democracy and giving communities more of a say as to how they're funded. Local Government (LG) budgets have continually fallen since 2007. Council Tax is based on property values of 24 years ago. This broken system is harming public services. It is possible to improve democracy and public services by giving LG basic income raising powers.

Jackie Baillie, Scottish Labour

Jackie is standing as a list candidate in the West of Scotland region. Jackie outlined a number of key Scottish Labour policies and ideas for the upcoming elections.

- The Labour Party has achieved 50/50 representation at each election but it's still not enough. Those hard won gains must be protected and more should be done. It is extremely positive that there are three female party leaders in Scotland but them being there is not enough in itself.
- The NHS is the most valued public institution in Scotland and Labour's greatest achievement. Scottish Labour would match the commitment to protect spending on health. However staff are struggling, they are under-resourced and are unable to do their job to the best of their ability. More investment is needed in prevention and primary care.
- Women's sectors are traditionally low paid and under-valued. The jobs which have been created in Scotland over the last few years are mainly temporary, part-time, zero hours contracts with low pay, which is not the kind of economy that's sustainable for the future. Growing the economy means investing in people from an early age. Labour would protect real term spending on education over the course of the next Parliament, putting measures in place not just to close the attainment gap but to raise attainment through the Fair Start fund.
- More powers are available at the Scottish Parliament and more are coming over taxation. This demands a greater maturity of debate. Scotland can continue with Tory austerity and make cuts that will harm Scotland's future or things can be done differently. Labour believe in investing in children, the economy and our future.

Katy Gordon, Scottish Liberal Democrats

Katy is the lead candidate on the Scottish Liberal Democrats (Lib Dems) list for the West of Scotland. Katy outlined a number of key Scottish Lib Dem policies and ideas for the elections in May.

- The Scottish Lib Dems have a four-point plan to spend half a billion pounds transforming Scottish education. They will give money to head teachers, who know what works best in their schools. The Scottish Lib Dems will massively expand free nursery education, providing a place for every 2 year old and increase the hours for 3 and 4 year olds. This will be provided on a more flexible basis than at present. The party will reverse cuts to education services. Protecting education budgets will give councils the means to keep teachers and support staff, to keep schools open and keep services that help children learn. The Lib Dems will also invest in colleges and put them on a good grounding for future years, ensuring that more people study and that businesses get the skills they need.
- In order to pay for this, the party will ask almost everyone to pay a little bit more. Just 1p on income tax will raise half a billion pounds to invest in our children's futures. Thanks to the increase in personal allowances, the poorest Scots will pay nothing extra and the richest will pay half of this investment. Those earning under £19k would pay less tax next year than they do this year.
- The Scottish Lib Dems have a bold, positive plan for change to put our children first and get fit for the future. Scotland needs strong Liberal voices standing for a stronger, fairer Scotland.

Suzanne McLaughlin, Scottish National Party

Suzanne is a candidate on the Scottish National Party (SNP) list for the Glasgow region. Suzanne outlined a number of key SNP policies and ideas for the upcoming Holyrood elections.

- The fact that the leaders of three main parties in Scotland are women is to be applauded. The amount of abuse and misogyny these women went through to get to where they are is no mean feat. It is no easy thing to stand for public office. Instead of hearing about what our party leaders wear, we should be listening to what they have to say. Everyday sexism is alive and well and it is beholden on women to call it out each and every single time we witness it.
- The First Minister is to be congratulated for creating the UK's first gender balanced Cabinet. However all parties, even the SNP, have work to do on gender balance. There is no time for anyone to rest on their laurels.
- Austerity is impacting significantly on women. When money is short, women go without and right now women are making the choice as to whether to heat their homes or to feed themselves and their families. Until women have full economic and financial independence there will never be gender equality.
- The SNP want Scotland to have the most progressive justice system in the world. That means putting an end to sentencing women for not paying fines. Only 2% of women currently in prison have committed violent offences. The majority of the rest are in for financial reasons, which comes back to poverty and inequality. No-one is served well when a disenfranchised woman, with multiple issues, is locked up at a cost to society and a cost to her. The Scottish Government has invested record levels into tackling Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG). Until VAWG is ended, there will never be equality.

Question and Answer Session

What are the parties doing to stop the erosion of trade union facility time? Where do they stand on the Trade Union Bill? Are they prepared to fight against it?

Suzanne McLaughlin, SNP

- Trade Union rights are the very fabric of our society and the rollback of these is a disgusting attack on workers. The SNP are utterly committed to protecting trade union rights. The SNP trade union group is hugely respected within the party and works closely with elected members.

Jackie Baillie, Scottish Labour

- Labour regard the Trade Union Bill as fundamental attack on rights and democracy, opposing it both at Westminster and the Scottish Parliament.
- Scottish Labour tried to introduce a Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) to object to the Bill in the Scottish Parliament. The party is encouraging the Scottish Government to follow the lead of Labour-lead Local Authorities who refuse to implement anti-trade union laws for their staff.

Martha Wardrop, Scottish Greens

- Scottish Green MSPs opposed and condemned the Trade Union Bill when it was debated in the Scottish Parliament. It has also been debated and opposed within Local Authorities (LA's). The party has also pushed for industrial action if necessary in defiance of the implementation of the Bill. Civil society has to resist any attack on trade union rights.
- There is a Scottish Green Party Trade Union Group which works closely with both the party and the trade unions.

Katy Gordon, Scottish Lib Dems

- During their time in Coalition Government the Lib Dems fought incredibly hard and lengthy battles with the Conservatives to stop the kind of attacks on trade unions and workers rights that are now being implemented.
- The Lib Dems totally oppose the Bill, which is an outrageous attack on trade union rights. The party are doing all they can to help LA's fight against it, however in Scotland there is a limit to what they can do as the legislation is being brought through by the UK Government.

Annie Wells, Scottish Conservatives

- Trade Unions are extremely important. There needs to be a voice where workers can have their voices heard.
- Trade Unions have such an important part to play in society and it is important to work with them, work together, and ensure everyone gets the best outcomes.



What is the Scottish Government's plan to address low pay and the gender gap in wages?

Suzanne McLaughlin, SNP

- The gender pay gap for women in Scotland is lower than that of the rest of the UK. The Scottish Government has also implemented the Equality Act 2010, which is a positive way to address and tackle low pay and the gender pay gap.
- The concept of a specific Gender Equality Bill is a good thing. Anything that pushes for an end to the gender pay gap is a good thing. While there are moves afoot, they are simply not quick enough.

Jackie Baillie, Scottish Labour

- More needs to be done on a practical level to make changes, as it's clear the legislation which has been put in place is not doing what it should. Labour has established the Low Pay Commission, which involves trade unions with experience of low pay. Labour would take a sectoral approach, looking at retail, care, hospitality, which are traditionally low paid sectors that are predominated by women.
- Opportunities need to be seized if we are going to make advances with low pay and the gender pay gap. Bolder action is required.

Martha Wardrop, Scottish Greens

- Voluntary measures have not worked, so perhaps specific legislation is required. Women are no longer going to accept low pay and the pay gap. Women need to work together to lobby strongly in support of the implementation of legislation.

Katy Gordon, Scottish Lib Dems

- When the Lib Dems were in coalition Government, Vince Cable, then Secretary of State for Business, announced he wanted 25% of women on the boards of the top 100 companies in UK by 2015. He made clear that the target was voluntary, however if it did not work then legislation would be announced. By just before the General Election, this target was achieved. This voluntary approach seemed to work, because of the clear indication that legislation would follow.
- Transparency is crucial regarding the gender pay gap. It is important that legislation has been implemented where companies over 250 employees have to publish gender pay gap data. There needs to be a willingness from all companies to be open about this information.

Annie Wells, Scottish Conservatives

- Transparency has to be key. We have to know where the imbalance is so we can work together fix it. No woman wants to work for 40p per hour less than anyone else. More needs to be done to make companies pay women what we deserve.

Points from the Floor

- While transparency is key in achieving equal pay, we need to look at the fact that there are people at the top of companies awarding themselves huge bonuses. Too many will give money to their shareholders before they start thinking about fair pay for employees. We need to take a harder line on this.

We have mentioned an increase in women’s participation and why women are less likely to become candidates for election, however there has not been a lot of talk about diversity. Is there something that we fail to do that we’re not doing for BME women?

Suzanne McLaughlin, SNP

- All bodies, including political parties and other organisations, have to constantly self-examine to ensure they are not unwittingly unwelcome to diverse membership and involvement.
- We have to constantly question why more diverse women aren’t becoming involved. That serves as a reminder that we constantly have to set ourselves targets. Women make up 52% of the population. If we could get to, for example, an elected position on merit and merit alone, then it would have happened already. We have to fight for more diversification.

Katy Gordon, Scottish Lib Dems

- The Scottish Lib Dems have not done enough, with one woman in Holyrood and none at Westminster. The party are trying to do things differently in the future, as not enough has been done not only on gender but also disability and ethnicity. The Lib Dems have introduced annual diversity reporting at conference each year. The party wants to be a welcoming place that reflects the society we have. That can only make politics better.

Martha Wardrop

- There is a Scottish Green Party Women’s network, which pushes for a gender balanced leadership and gender balancing in the selection of candidates. The party has pushed forward all women, however more work still has to be done.



Since the SNP believe that they should have greater budgetary control without interference from Westminster in order to determine how money should be spent in Scotland, why will they not extend this right to local authorities so that they too can have control over their budgets and have the freedom to increase or decrease council tax after deciding their own priorities?

Jackie Baillie, Scottish Labour

- A Government cannot freeze income and expect services to continue to be provided at a certain level. LA provision is not just for vulnerable people, it’s for everyone. There used to be real importance placed on public services, however people don’t seem to be attaching that same value any more.
- If Council Tax were raised by 1%, it could raise £19 million. LA’s are facing a budget deficit of £500 million, so Council Tax would have to be stratospheric in order to make up the difference. The bulk of money comes from the Scottish Government, who could be using the powers they have at the moment to raise income tax. This would show how much they value public services and want to invest in them in order to grow the economy.

Katy Gordon, Scottish Lib Dems

- The Lib Dems fundamentally believe in devolving power to the most local level of decision making. Taking away powers from LA’s and keeping them centrally at Holyrood has had a significant impact.

- People need to question how things like potholes, education and local health services are going to be paid for. The powers are there, however rather than use them the Scottish Government has threatened LA's with punitive fines if they raise Council Tax in their areas. Different choices could be made, because the Scottish Government has the power to make them, rather than blame Westminster for everything.
- While people don't like to think about paying more tax, if we are to continue to have good public services then these have to be paid for somehow.

Martha Wardrop, Scottish Green Party

- LA's and COSLA (the Convention for Scottish Local Authorities) have been highlighting that the cuts to their budgets are not workable. In real terms, the cuts mean a threat to a lot of local jobs within the public sector. LA's are having to look at compulsory redundancies, changes to people's terms and conditions, cuts to working hours and the closure of libraries, community centres and other local services which are well-used by women. The Council Tax freeze has resulted in the gradual cut back of local services, without taking into account the realities of people's lives within communities. Carers, for example, are expected to do more. They look after some of the most vulnerable people in society, yet their work is undervalued and underpaid.
- The Scottish Green Party want to see delivery on the recommendations of the Commission on Local Tax Reform. There needs to be an examination of what can be done using the new fiscal framework. Strong Local Government needs the support of the Scottish Government.

Annie Wells, Scottish Conservatives

- Power should go to LA's and beyond. The people making the choices about how funds are allocated and money is spent should be those who deliver the services.



We keep hearing about the money being put into the NHS to boost medical services i.e. nurses and doctors, but what about the money that's used to fund Private Contractors in the Facilities/Estates Departments? Facilities and Estates are comparable to Nursing and Medical Directorates. Services could not run without the provision of adequate input from plumbers, engineers, domestics etc, however we seem to have more and more privatisation of these services. Given the First Minister, when in her role as Health Minister, assured the public and trade unions that they would keep NHS jobs safe, why are they allowing privatisation in by the back door? Jobs have been safeguarded through the no compulsory redundancy policy, even though many would welcome voluntary redundancy, particularly women having to work on due to pension changes. And when is this drain on resources going to be looked at and stopped in order to allow NHS funding to be utilized properly for the good of patients?

Martha Wardrop, Scottish Greens

- The Greens do not support the privatisation of services in any way. We have to support public sector workers and work with staff groups within hospitals, planning investment in facilities to make sure public sector jobs are protected.

Jackie Baillie, Scottish Labour

- There is a significant backlog in estates, with many repairs needing done, which have been classed as urgent, but they are still not being carried out. When facilities work needs done the NHS bring in private providers to carry out the work. That needs to stop.

Suzanne McLaughlin, SNP

- The SNP, like others, do not want to see compulsory redundancies, however voluntary redundancy is another thing, so that conversation clearly needs to be had. As it stands, Scotland is dependent on money from Westminster and if cuts are made to budgets there then difficult choices have to be made. The First Minister has to make choices, and often all she is able to do is mitigate the impact of decisions made elsewhere.

Katy Gordon, Scottish Lib Dems

- With regards to the NHS, when money comes to Scotland it is up to the Scottish Government to decide how it is spent. They do not have to make the same choices as have been made in England and Wales. There has been a significant under spend in the last year. Some of that money could have gone into the NHS.



What will you do to encourage the development of the local economy and the creation of jobs in rural areas? In particular, what support will be made available for young people and unemployed people to gain sustainable, meaningful employment?

Annie Wells, Scottish Conservatives

- The Scottish Conservatives stand for aspiration and opportunity. The party is looking to get back the majority of the 150,000 college places which have been taken away. Education and training programmes need to provide what people want. There is no point in providing college and university places if they are not needed. More needs to be done to look at jobs which are available and needed in specific areas and ensure that they are undertaken fairly.

Katy Gordon, Scottish Lib Dems

- The extension of fibre optic broadband and increased mobile coverage can make a big difference to small and rural businesses being able to develop. Another area which needs to be tackled in rural areas is the unfair high transport and delivery charges, as these have an impact on rural business.
- Many colleges have been forced into mergers and regionalisation which has seen the closure of local facilities. This has been detrimental in rural areas, because students then have to travel further.

Suzanne McLaughlin, SNP

- A number of things can be done to promote economic growth in rural areas. Land reform and community empowerment are important. More also needs to be done to need to support new forms of finance for small businesses.
- The Land Reform Bill, as well as the Community Empowerment Bill, will be very positive for rural communities.

- Young people who do not wish to or who are unable to go to university, should encouraged to become entrepreneurs. Small and medium enterprises are the backbone not just of local communities, but the country itself. Getting a bank loan or getting a degree are no longer guaranteed routes to owning a business or getting a job. Other avenues should be explored and encouraged.

Jackie Baillie, Scottish Labour

- There needs to be investment in people, skills and education, so the industries that are coming have well-equipped workforces. In fifteen to twenty years, we will have a digital economy, which will bring huge opportunities. These will not, however, be capitalised on in all areas. Many parts of Scotland do not have 3G, let alone 4G, and broadband is very slow. The young people in these areas will miss out on real opportunities unless more is done to support them.

Martha Wardrop, Scottish Greens

- The Scottish Green Party believe in the importance of looking at a fossil fuel free future. Action needs to be taken on climate change, as well as a real effort to reduce carbon emissions and the creation of a more safe and sustainable economy through investment in renewable energy.
- There also needs to be investment in rural and island economies, offshore, and wind industries, forestry, sustainable biomass, decommissioning the North Sea oil platforms and research and training within local communities.



The rise in Islamophobia attacks since the Paris attack has had a shambolic response by both the media and the political parties. The attacks are mostly on women and children; the reporting to the police is underrepresented due to the nature of the attacks that nothing can be resolved. This is a perceived hate crime, and how should this be taken forward by political means?

Annie Wells, Scottish Conservatives

- Hate crime should not exist in any culture or country whatsoever. It must be treated as the serious crime that it is. No-one should be threatened or face violence or verbal attacks. Victims should not be questioned as to what they did to provoke an attack. They have done nothing wrong. This has to be dealt with seriously.

Point from the Floor

- The Conservative Government are responsible for the rise in Islamophobia, through anti-terrorism legislation and extremism legislation. That Government has ensured that the tabloid press have been allowed to talk about terrorists and Muslims in the same way, stirring up a culture of fear.

Suzanne McLaughlin, SNP

- The language used is particularly damaging, particularly that used by the Prime Minister and the UK Government overall. Describing human beings as 'swarms of migrants' is sickening. Islamophobia must be stamped out.

Katy Gordon, Scottish Lib Dems

- The way in which people are allowed to talk about each other is dangerous. With the refugee crisis, there is almost an idea of 'them' and 'us'.

- Governments and all political parties need to take a lead on this, making clear that refugees and immigrants are welcome. The value that those from other countries bring to Scotland and the UK as a whole needs to be expressed. It is a myth that people who come here are a drain on the economy.

Martha Wardrop, Scottish Greens

- The Muslim community have opened their doors to the wider community on several occasions, promoting a positive message about solidarity and unity. Scotland is open to everyone, and tries hard to promote tolerance and justice.
- More needs to be done to support initiatives, ensuring people have the information and support they need to be able to report hate crime. This includes adequate third party reporting services, with local organisations victims can use to receive support. The third party can then take the issue forward to the police and carry out support on an ongoing basis.

Jackie Baillie, Scottish Labour

- It is vital that society does not buy into what the media and the tabloids are saying. There is a challenge on all of us to recognise that our nation was built on the basis of immigration. The message needs to be clear: Islamophobic attacks are completely unacceptable, whether it is politicians tweeting their colleagues, or people being assaulted in the streets. We need to use the law to challenge that behaviour.



What tax would you introduce to meet local needs?

Katy Gordon, Scottish Lib Dems

- The Scottish Lib Dems want to introduce a penny on the income tax which will address local needs. The party believe in devolving power as far as possible.

Annie Wells, Scottish Conservatives

- Local Councils have to be responsible for raising some of the money that is spent locally. The Council Tax freeze needs to be looked at so as much money as possible can be put back into the community.

Martha Wardrop, Scottish Greens

- The party are long term supporters of land value tax and believe in bringing derelict land back into the system. This could raise £300 million per year for house building. The Scottish Greens would like to see 50% of tax being raised locally and the end of centralisation of LA funding.

Jackie Baillie, Scottish Labour

- The Council Tax freeze cannot continue in its state, because local services are not being adequately funded. We will all be poorer for that. Labour will bring forward proposals looking to abolish Council Tax, replacing it with a fairer system. The key is that it's locally raised and locally accountable.

Suzanne McLaughlin, SNP

- The SNP manifesto is not yet written, however the party are committed to fair taxation rather than an across the board hike which will hit the poor and the working poor the most.

SWC Manifesto for the Holyrood Elections 2016

Women attending the event were encouraged to contribute to the SWC's manifesto for the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections. They were asked to note down priorities under the following headings:

- Education and Employment.
- Health and Social Care.
- Political and Public Life.

The SWC will use this information, as well as the voices of women gathered at other events, to inform the content of the manifesto. This will be launched early in March. Women across Scotland will be encouraged to use the manifesto to hold parliamentary candidates to account on a number of issues relating to gender equality.

Comments from attendees

"The Q&A session was very interesting and informative. I learned a lot about a variety of issues."

"I am delighted to see so many women in the same room who all want the same thing - a better future for them and their children and a fairer Scotland. Thank you for organising."

"Again, another well organised event by the SWC. Keep up the good work in engaging with women from all backgrounds, cultures and beliefs. Great to hear a wide range of speakers on a variety of issues."

"Great venue, great speakers. Lots of information available for first time attendees. I'll definitely be back!"