



Scottish Parliament Elections Hustings Event

Saturday 9th April

**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 has organised similar events around the Scottish Parliament elections in 2016. By bringing together representatives of the main political parties, women have been able to ask questions which are important to them leading up to the May vote.

This event was held at the Hilton Grosvenor Hotel, Glasgow, on Saturday 9th April. Representatives from seven of Scotland's main political parties set out manifesto commitments and key policies for the upcoming elections. Women were able to ask questions relevant to them, their families and communities across Scotland. The session was chaired by Agnes Tolmie, SWC Chair.

The SWC would like to thank all of those who attended and contributed to worthwhile discussions.



Annabel Goldie - Scottish Conservative Party

Annabel was an MSP for the West of Scotland from 1999 to 2016. Annabel outlined a number of key Scottish Conservative Party policies and ideas for the upcoming Holyrood elections.

- The Conservatives believe that the economy matters, for opportunity and for the potential of ordinary working people and their families. The Conservatives believe that if someone is working they should have as much money in their pocket at the end of the month as possible.
- The gender pay gap continues to be a major issue and challenge for women. The Equality Act 2010 has made significant progress in tackling that, particularly with regards to section 78. This part of the legislation has the power to make regulations requiring private employers with at least 250 employees to publish information about the differences in the pay of their male and female employees. The Conservative Party is committed to implementing this.
- They have also introduced a new national living wage, which will make a difference to many women, who often find themselves in low paid jobs.
- When it comes to opportunity, education is vital. Many women do not pursue careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths). There have been improvements elsewhere in the UK because funding has been put into a programme to encourage more women to take up these roles. This should be supported in Scotland.
- The Conservatives believe that childcare provision should be extended to 1 and 2 year olds, starting with those from poorest backgrounds. At present, there is too much rigidity in provision, with support focused more on the provider than on the parent. Parents need flexibility through the use of childcare vouchers, which would be a major step forward.

Johann Lamont, Scottish Labour Party

Johann is the Scottish Labour and Co-operative candidate for the Scottish Parliament constituency of Glasgow Pollok. Johann outlined a number of key Labour Party policies and ideas for the upcoming Holyrood elections.

- Scottish Labour are committed to understanding how inequality is experienced by women, identifying solutions and working out how they will be funded.
- Scottish Labour have a commitment to fair work and the consequences of unfair work. The concept of flexibility which has evolved has increasingly meant that women are expected to be flexible in the workplace, however they are not afforded that when it comes to pay and conditions.
- Any business pledge should include flexibility for all carers. Unpaid carers want to work, and an astonishing number have to give up their jobs because they do not have the flexibility to care and to continue working.
- Thinking on women needs to be mainstreamed. That means not disproportionately cutting further education, particularly part-time college courses, which denies opportunities for those with caring responsibilities to train and get the skills to access work. It also means not disproportionately attacking local government funding because women rely on and work in those services.
- Scottish Labour are arguing for a rise of 1p on the basic rate of taxation. Income Public services they need to be funded properly in order to provide support and assistance to those who need it. Cuts to Local Authority budgets mean that women are picking up the slack.

Carole Ford, Scottish Liberal Democrats

Carole is the Scottish Liberal Democrat candidate for the Scottish Parliament constituency of Glasgow Kelvin. Carole outlined a number of key Lib Dem policies and ideas for the upcoming Holyrood elections.

- Education is the single most important factor in opening opportunities for individuals and creating the kind of society we want to live in. The Lib Dems are deeply concerned about what is happening to Scottish education.
- Literacy and numeracy rates in primary schools have dropped. The curriculum has been squeezed in secondary schools, reducing the number of subjects which young people can choose from. That is one of the reasons many young women are unable to go into STEM subjects. There have been cuts to 152,000 college places, which allowed a lot of women a 'second chance' at education.
- The Lib Dems consider this a crisis and would therefore introduce a policy to put a penny onto income tax, which would go back into education. This would result in an increase in the number of nursery places, more money in schools, as well as an increase in college places.
- One in four people will suffer a mental health (MH) issue in their lives. It is an enormous issue yet it is seen as the 'Cinderella service' of our NHS. The Lib Dems would double the amount of money that goes to child and adolescent MH, as well as ensuring the presence of a MH specialist is in every A&E department, police station and GP surgery.
- The Scottish Lib Dems are also opposed to the idea of a second referendum. Scotland's economy is suffering as a result of the uncertainty around this, with a growth rate of less than half of the rest of the UK. Scotland needs stability.

Linda Fabiani, Scottish National Party

Linda is the Scottish National Party (SNP) candidate for the Scottish Parliament constituency of East Kilbride. Linda outlined a number of key SNP policies and ideas for the upcoming Holyrood elections.

- Health, the economy and education are important. A level of equality, however, needs to be built in so that Scotland can move forward and build on achievements. The Scottish Government has shown real leadership in equality through the First Minister's gender balanced Cabinet. This sends out really strong message.
- The SNP are leading the way on more equal workplaces. Female employment is at its highest since records began. The gender pay gap is also narrowing – we have seen a drop of 2% in the last year which is extremely positive.
- Encouraging women into STEM courses is crucial. We have to boost the funding of organisations like Equate Scotland. There are an increasing number of females achieving STEM qualifications but they do not always go on to work in the fields they have studied. The transition from study into workplaces has to be looked at, as well as why talent is being lost. As part of the Fair Work Programme, training and development measures can be implemented to encourage young women to remain in those fields.
- The SNP has the team and the leader, as well as the vision, to take Scotland forward. There are also policies which will protect Scotland and ensure that everything the party does is in the best interests of our Scotland's future.



Question and Answer Session

Legislation was passed in 2003 which means that children with certain additional support needs, including those on the autistic spectrum, are put into mainstream school. A recent campaign by the Evening Times newspaper and the group 'PACT' has highlighted how this is having an impact on children and their families in Glasgow. What does your party plan to do about this blanket legislation which is proving to be detrimental to some children?

Johann Lamont, Scottish Labour

- That legislation was driven by families who believed in the assumption that a child could and should be supported in mainstream education. Time has passed, however, so we should review legislation and listen to what families are saying. We also need to look at the mainstream environment. We provide teachers, books and buildings but we don't have classroom assistants or attendance officers - the people who worked with children who need a bit of help to allow them to stay in mainstream education. The presumption in favour of mainstreaming is not necessarily a bad thing, but it doesn't always make sense as a blanket proposal.

Carole Ford, Scottish Liberal Democrats

- Parents who want their children to go to mainstream school should be able to get into the school environment and see what it will be like for them then take it from there. We should review the legislation, realising that children are individuals and have different needs. If mainstream is not suitable, then there should be alternative arrangements.

Linda Fabiani, SNP

- Before the last Parliament ended, the Cabinet Secretary for Education announced a review of additional support education which will most likely focus on that legislation. That should be tied into the autism strategy, which was passed by the Scottish Government a few years ago and which also needs to be looked at again. It has to be recognised that everyone has different needs and this must be looked at overall, taking parent's views into account.

Annabel Goldie, Scottish Conservatives

- The 2003 Act was introduced to avoid a sense of difference between children, which is important. The Conservatives want to see people with educational experience running schools. We want to give Head teachers more control over how they run their schools, giving them flexibility over their own budgets etc. That could result in a much better fit between the school and the local area.

Do you agree that the ability to collaborate with each other and acknowledge what other parties have achieved refreshing to the electorate, rather than watching them fight with each other all the time?

Linda Fabiani, SNP

- I would like to see the main parties get together and decide on two or three fundamental issues which are considered to be so important that no matter who ends up in power, they are always protected.

Annabel Goldie, Scottish Conservatives

- Having different parties with different policies means people have more of a choice, which is important for democracy. In Scotland there is, at times, an amazing capacity for the main parties to come together, even under the most unlikely circumstances. That's really something we should be proud of.

Carole Ford, Scottish Liberal Democrats

- The issue that all parties should come together on and collaborate is, without a doubt, the NHS. There is a danger around its security if we continue to play party politics about how it is funded and what services we provide.

Johann Lamont, Scottish Labour

- My party has always worked with other parties on women's issues, however sometimes there is no consensus and we do have to be honest when there is a divide.

Under the last Labour Government, tax credit late payment charges were sitting around £2m. When the Conservatives got into power that went up to well over £20m. Families are paying for that. Who is this economy growing on the back of?

Annabel Goldie, Scottish Conservatives

- When the Coalition Government came into power they were faced with a larger deficit than had ever been seen. That deficit has reduced, which is a good thing, because it means that taxes can be put back into public services.

- The Conservatives want to create an economy where there are opportunities for people to get into work. Since 2010, across the UK, over 2,300,000 jobs have been created. A large number of those are in Scotland, which has led to the rise in female employment which is something to celebrate. Many people are struggling to make ends meet despite the fact they are in work. They will not benefit from another penny on the pound in income tax.

All of the panel are agreed that children need the best possible chances in life and children with special needs need help and attention – these achievements all cost money. If you cut Local Authority budgets and refuse to raise taxes then where does the money come from to pay for them?

Carole Ford, Scottish Liberal Democrats

- The Scottish Lib Dems will raise the income tax level by a penny in the pound, the revenue from which will be put back into education.

Linda Fabiani, SNP

- Tax doesn't only mean income tax. The SNP have already replaced stamp duty, which will bring in more money. New council tax changes will also bring in money from those above the first four bands, who can afford it more. That money will go back into education.

Johann Lamont, Scottish Labour

- Council tax is a regressive tax which Labour would get rid of and redesign to make local funding fairer and better. A penny on the pound is progressive. Someone who earns £20,000 per year would pay an additional £19. Is that better off in their pocket or being spent publicly so that their children have a classroom assistant, or access to a library? A teacher would pay around £400 per year more, but they wouldn't have to bring in their own pencils, paper and they would not see the removal of vital support services within their schools.

Annabel Goldie, Scottish Conservatives

- There will be consequences if we create a regime whereby Scotland is the most taxed part of the UK. Businesses will be less likely to invest, which will mean fewer jobs. Vulnerable families do not need the tax man taking any more money out of their pockets.

More and more people are suffering from mental health issues which means more spending. What are the parties doing to make sure they are addressing the root causes of mental health issues?

Annabel Goldie, Scottish Conservatives

- There are complex issues surrounding mental health. Across the parties there is a general understanding of the importance of a focus on mental health. The Equal Opportunities Committee carried out an inquiry into loneliness a few years ago which raised a lot of issues around mental health. It found that dealing with that could dramatically improve the wellbeing of individuals. Contact with other people is so important. More needs to be done within communities to tackle loneliness.

Carole Ford, Scottish Liberal Democrats

- Mental health is a major issue in Scotland. The Scottish Lib Dems will put money into assigned mental health professionals to each GP practice. GPs should also be given the power for social prescription such as exercise regimes. Fundamentally, spending on mental health has to increase.

Linda Fabiani, SNP

- We were the first Government within UK to create waiting times for mental health services. We have also agreed additional funding for existing services. We need to ensure there is still a distinction between clinical mental health issues and those which affect people on a day to day basis. We have to recognise that alternative or complimentary services are not beneficial to everyone.

Johann Lamont, Scottish Labour

- It is right that there has been a consensus and a change around the issue of mental health. People who suffer from mental ill health need more support from community organisations which can help tackle social isolation and loneliness and can then improve wellbeing. They need to be adequately funded.

The panel have all agreed that low pay affects women disproportionately. New jobs which have been created are low paid, low skilled on zero hours and temporary contracts with no flexibility, which predominantly affects women. What are you going to do to tackle this model which is failing women?

Annabel Goldie, Scottish Conservatives

- Some recent research shows that of those on zero hours contracts, 70% are in education and that type of work suited them. 66% didn't want more hours and they were happy with the flexibility that they were offered, so that needs to be borne in mind. Some employers will not allow their employees who are on zero hours contracts to work with any other employers. That's not right. No employer should have a monopoly on what a person does.

Linda Fabiani, SNP

- There are a lot of unfair employment practices which people have to put up with. Unfortunately the SNP did not have the power to do anything about that directly, however we did provide a significant amount of mitigation. For example, the introduction of the living wage for our employees, as well as the establishment of the Fair Work Convention. We have done what we can with the limited resources we have.

Johann Lamont, Scottish Labour

- It's important to recognise that women and low pay go hand in hand. In-work poverty is a real issue and one we need to tackle. We should have well skilled, well motivated people who are recognised and who are treated with respect when they do their job. It is not economically in the interests of Scotland to have low paid jobs with limited rights. We all know that supporting the workforce increases productivity. Scottish Labour would set up a Living Wage Commission. We would also opposed public bodies contracting work out to private contractors who support low paid, low skilled work.



Cat Boyd, RISE

Cat is the lead candidate for RISE in Glasgow. Cat outlined a number of key RISE policies and ideas for the upcoming Holyrood elections.

- RISE will provide a living income for carers. The care provided by friends and family members to ill, frail or disabled relatives is worth a staggering amount. This type of work should be treated as such. Carers deserve a living income.
- Improving the lives of women in Scotland is paramount if there is to be a more equal society. Representation in politics is not enough. RISE will tackle sexism head on, through the introduction of an anti-sexism Bill.
- Scotland needs the full powers of an independent country in order to tackle the full extent of inequality of wealth and powers. RISE supports a second referendum on independence within the lifespan of the next Parliament. This should happen with or without the consent of Westminster.
- RISE would redirect defence spending towards green energy and investment and a universal basic income. Scotland must be rid of Trident and out of NATO.
- There are glaring and rampant inequalities in society in Scotland. In order to tackle this, the top rate of income tax on those earning over £150,000 per year would be raised to 60p in the pound. As well as this, RISE would replace Council Tax with an income based Scottish Service Tax.
- An Economic Justice Fund would provide an immediate, unconditional means of support for anyone appealing a benefits assessment or sanction.
- 100,000 publicly-owned, democratically managed, environmentally friendly homes would also be built.

Zara Kitson, Scottish Green Party

Zara is a list candidate in the Glasgow region for the Scottish Parliament elections. Zara outlined a number of key Green Party policies and ideas for the upcoming Holyrood elections.

- The Scottish Greens are committed to doing business differently, by pushing for fair pay, decent jobs, workers' rights and opportunities for co-operative enterprise. Better support to help people find work, as well as an end to punitive sanctions placed upon those who cannot find a job, are necessary.
- An increase to the Carer's Allowance would recognise the value of unpaid care, which is essential for our society and economy, but continues to be undervalued and underpaid. Care workers - whether paid or unpaid - deserve better conditions. There needs to be greater recognition of carers and a push for increased financial and practical support.
- Everyone should have a good home, of a decent standard and which is affordable. Scotland can build more homes, which will create new jobs and will also help to provide decent accommodation for all. More social rented homes, fairer rents and better quality management in the private rented sector are needed. Nobody should be unable to heat their home. Green MSPs will continue to make ending fuel poverty a national priority.
- Education is a fundamental right. Scotland has schools and colleges to be proud of, but they have seen years of cuts. Teachers are faced with unsustainable workload. The Scottish Greens will pay for more teachers, close the attainment gap and create more opportunities for everyone.

Anne Beetham, Women's Equality Party

Anne is a list candidate in the Glasgow region for the Scottish Parliament elections. Anne outlined a number of key Women's Equality (WE) Party policies and ideas for the upcoming Holyrood elections.

- WE expect equal pay for equal work. WE will tackle the causes of the pay gap, including the existing imbalances that leave many women, including those who are unpaid carers or in low-paid jobs, particularly vulnerable to inequality.
- Everyone should have the ability to share opportunities and responsibilities in the workplace and at home. WE would develop a system of universal childcare, available at the end of parental leave. As well as that, all care providers should pay their staff at least a living wage.
- WE seek an end to violence against women and girls (VAWG), recognising that it is a violation of human rights, as well as a public health issue. A system of legal support for victims of gender-based violence would be designed, starting by establishing independent legal representation for victims of sexual assault and rape and providing free legal aid for victims of domestic abuse.
- WE are pushing for equal representation in politics, business, industry and throughout working life. Power is not shared equally in society and this hurts everybody. We will push the Government to ensure that all women, including BME, disabled and LGBTI+ women, are represented in all decision-making and that 50% of ministerial posts are held by women.
- Education should create opportunities for all children equally. WE will promote a 'whole school approach' on gender equality, which should include staff training, pupils and parents involvement, a commitment to diversity and equal opportunities and building a positive environment for all genders.



Question and Answer Session

How can we stop schools from excluding vulnerable young people from sitting their exams?

Cat Boyd, RISE

- I was in a school recently which has a young mum's unit, whereby young pregnant women or those who have had children at a young age can still go to school because the facilities are there for their children to be looked after. This is a very positive, pioneering project. Every school in Scotland should be able to offer that type of facility - that's a question of funding. There needs to be more investment to make sure that no matter your circumstances, you have access to free, fair and equal education

Zara Kitson, Scottish Greens

- This is a rights issue – every child has the right to education and their background should not preclude them from attending school and sitting exams. Through our proposals on education, every child should have the same access to opportunities. We would like to see a move away from national standardised testing which does not result in positive outcomes for children from vulnerable backgrounds in particular. We are committed to pushing those issues.

Anne Beetham, Women's Equality Party

- No school is an isolated entity. Local Authorities should be making provision to allow those children to take their exams. They have a duty of care to that child to ensure they are able to fulfil their educational needs.

People are being forced to live in expensive rented accommodation because they can't get social housing. Rich landlords are becoming richer, mainly by charging double the amount of Councils and Housing Associations. What are you going to do about the current housing situation in Scotland?

Anne Beetham, Women's Equality Party

- It is so important that women have access to good quality housing. My party are looking at that specifically in terms of VAWG - it is vital that there is a place of safety for women. Women who are the victims of domestic abuse should be able to remain in their homes. They should not have to become 'homeless' and uproot their children from their schools and communities.

Zara Kitson, Scottish Green Party

- Access to a home and shelter is such a basic right, yet we have a homelessness crisis. There are more children living within temporary accommodation, which means families have no stability. The Scottish Greens have a commitment to building 12,000 sustainable homes every year. Housing should not be a commodity. We have done some work around rent rights already in the Scottish Parliament, aiming to ensure that the private sector is more regulated and there is a cap on rent rates so people aren't being exploited.

Cat Boyd, RISE

- Rent control is something that costs no money and which can be done now. We have carried out some research recently, which has shown that if a person lives anywhere between Charing Cross and Maryhill in Glasgow, their rent within the private sector will be on average £449 per month. Their rent from a Housing Association is on average £199 per month. That is a moral disgrace – housing is a right, not a privilege. RISE have committed to a programme of social house building to try and alleviate the housing crisis through the creation of 100,000 homes in the first year of the Parliament. There has been a real failure in terms of planning and democracy. Houses are not built to last and they are built in a way which increases the 'ghettoisation' of communities. We support the creation of a national unitary board made up of tenants representatives, housing associations, architects etc, who can ensure that future homes are fit for purpose.

We all know the issues faced by women in the BME community faces, such as domestic abuse, forced marriage, human trafficking and FGM. We experience real challenges in reaching out to organisations because of, for example, cultural and trust issues. While there are organisations that represent the BME community, they are not adequately supported. What are you going to do to address and tackle the issues that face BME women?

Anne Beetham, Women's Equality Party

- We want to listen to what every aspect of the electorate has to say. Panels and representation overall undoubtedly needs to be more diverse.

- We need more BME women coming forward to ensure the focus is kept on issues which are important to them. We also continually need to take into consideration that we're talking about equality for all women. and it is particularly concerning that out of 1222 councillors across Scotland only 4 are non-white BME women.

Zara Kitson, Scottish Green Party

- We have to ask tough questions as to why we're not seeing BME women represented in politics. We have to remember that as well as the barriers we've already mentioned around discrimination, there are intersections within women's representation. BME, disabled and LB women face other forms of discrimination which needs to be understood in policy making. We need to work collaboratively with the BME community to be able to fully to address barriers to representation in political and public life. We also, fundamentally, have to recognise where institutional racism exists. We have a responsibility to call it out where we see it, especially if it's one of the key barriers to participation. We should be speaking up where local and national government are failing communities.

Cat Boyd, RISE

- Within RISE we're tried to develop and support a BME network, which allows for the self-organisation of BME members. That network has been very vibrant which is a really positive thing. We have to recognise that racism is pervasive and that in Scotland we still have very real problems with racism. In acknowledging this, RISE wants to see the official recognition of Scotland's role in the history of slavery within the British empire. That should be taught in schools. There also needs to be an immediate end to all detentions and deportations. We are constantly told that the Scottish Government do not have the power to stop deportations. We believe that if it's happening in Scotland, the Scottish Government should be standing up for the people who are being persecuted by a racist immigration policy that's coming from Westminster.



SWC Manifesto for the Holyrood Elections 2016

The SWC has produced a manifesto ahead of the Scottish Parliament elections. This document is informed by the voices of women throughout Scotland and was launched as part of our International Women's Day celebrations. We are encouraging women to use the manifesto to hold parliamentary candidates to account on a number of issues relating to gender equality. A copy is available at: <http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/userfiles/files/SWC%20Manifesto%20Holyrood%202016.pdf>. You can also email info@scottishwomensconvention.org or call the office on 0141 339 4797.



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