



Response to the Scottish Government's Equality Statement:

Draft Budget 2013 - 2014

Submission Date November 2012

Background

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, as well as relevant policy and decision makers.

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

Introduction and Evidence Base

The SWC has consulted with women throughout Scotland using numerous communication channels including roadshows and thematic events, surveys, Geographical Information Groups and Conferences.

The response to the Scottish Government's Equality Statement on the Draft Budget for 2013-2014 is informed by the voices of women participating in SWC activities. The main focus of the 2012 roadshow programme has been cuts to public services and the impact of changes to welfare benefits on women. The SWC has also been discussing women in the criminal justice system.

Although some issues are specific to certain geographical areas, in the main, women throughout Scotland have concerns and opinions concerning key services such as transport, health, employment, education, childcare and housing.

www.scottishwomensconvention.org

Overview

The SWC welcomes the Equality Statement which accompanies the 2013-2014 Draft Budget.

This Budget is set against the backdrop of a challenging economic climate and that the Government must focus on measures to accelerate economic growth and recovery.

There is no doubt that the UK Coalition Government's economic reforms are having a detrimental impact on women. It is vital that resources in Scotland, both at local and national levels, are allocated to ensure that women are given equality of opportunity. There are a number of provisions within the Spending Review and Budget which do this, however certain areas must be given greater gender equality consideration.

This response to the Equality Statement will examine each Budget Portfolio in turn.

Opening Comments

The SWC welcomes recognition by the Scottish Government of women's precarious position within the labour market. Throughout Scotland, concern has consistently been expressed at the reduction and removal of jobs in the public sector, where women predominate. In many cases, full-time jobs have been reduced to part-time or job-share.

"The amalgamation of jobs has led to one person doing the job of three people"

The stress of looking for a job is described as "*horrendous*", especially as there are few vacant positions in the current economic climate. Agency work is available because it is cost effective for businesses. It is not, however, often suitable for women due to unreliable and in many cases anti-social hours. Accessing affordable childcare to cover this type of work is very difficult.

The UK Coalition Government's Welfare Reform measures will have a deep and lasting impact on women. The SWC therefore commends the Scottish Government for attempting to mitigate the circumstances of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, insofar as its powers allow, through the Welfare Reform (Further Provision) Act 2012.

Changes to the way in which welfare benefits and tax credits are applied for and administered are already having an impact on women throughout the country.

From April 2012, claimants will have to apply for Universal Credit (UC) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) online. Not all women have access to the internet and some may lack the skills and confidence to use a computer. Concern has been expressed by those forced to use libraries, internet cafes etc to complete their applications. There is a complete lack of privacy in these places.

"I don't want my confidential information lying all about the library for everyone to see."

At present there is not enough information available to those who will be affected by changes to Welfare Benefits. There is currently a lot of scaremongering and women are concerned they will not have enough money to feed their children, run their homes, pay for childcare etc.

Health and Wellbeing

NHS and Special Boards

The Scottish Government's commitment to the promotion of equality, by retaining the budget at £20.3 million, is supported.

Concerns have been raised about cuts within the NHS which have led to job roles being changed from full time to job share, part time or removed altogether. Women make up the majority of the NHS workforce and are most affected when job opportunities are reduced. While there will be no percentage increase in wages, the minimum increase of £250 for those earning below £21,000 is welcomed.

Women, particularly in rural areas, have commented on NHS24. Waiting for a call back can delay crucial medical treatment, especially given the distance that has to be covered in order to access hospitals in more remote parts of the country. Many take it upon themselves to go straight to hospital in order to avoid unnecessary waits.

"It just doesn't work for rural people."

Similarly, the cost of contacting NHS24 can have a detrimental impact on women. Calls are chargeable and can become very expensive. This can often deter people from using the service. Consideration of further investment in NHS24 to specifically assist remote, rural and super sparse areas of the country would be welcomed.

The allocation of expenditure to NHS Boards, while based on relative need, is not seen to reflect the real requirements of all communities. In the past, on-call doctors served smaller towns and villages, which ensured urgent medical assistance was administered to those in need. Reinstating this service would better serve the requirements of rural communities. As well as ensuring treatment, patients may not have to be unnecessarily removed from families and support networks to seek medical advice.

The need for patient transport is very different in urban and rural areas. Public transport in more remote parts of the country is *"inconsistent and expensive"*, therefore there is a requirement for dedicated services to take patients to and from hospital. In Stranraer, for example, there is a community hospital. Many appointments, however, are undertaken at Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary.

"There's no bus that will get you into Dumfries for 9.30am."

Sport

The SWC held a conference on Women and the Media in September 2011. The issue of young women who cease to be involved in physical activity was discussed. A lack of positive role models within sport was viewed as one of the contributing factors to this. It is therefore hoped that the Scottish Government will draw upon the female 'sporting heroes' of the Olympic Games in order to encourage more young women to either remain or become active in sport.

Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth

The SWC attended and participated in the Scottish Government's Women's Employment Summit, held in September 2012. The consistent rise in female unemployment has resulted in discussion around barriers to seeking and remaining in work. Women continue to be clustered in roles in what is known as the '5 c's' - catering, cleaning, caring, cashiering and clerical. These jobs offer little in the way of training, development and progression.

Many women are forced to work on a part-time basis, meaning reduced wage potential, because of caring responsibilities. The cost of private childcare is very high in Scotland. As a result some women sacrifice returning to work full time in order to look after their children.

Childcare provision in Scotland is a huge barrier to women accessing and sustaining employment. Throughout the country, women comment on the lack of childcare provision available to meet their needs. Shift work and unsociable hours are not recognised working patterns with regards to the services available. Distance travelled to access childcare, in addition to hours worked, is having a detrimental impact on quality family time on a daily basis.

Informal caring is relied heavily upon, with some women in the *"middle level of caring, looking after both young grandchildren and elderly parents."* This can have a detrimental effect on the physical and mental health of these women, a number of whom continue to also be employed in part-time jobs.

Women are expected to live on wages that have not increased in a number of years, while the cost of living continues to rise. This is particularly the case for rural women. Fuel prices, for example are *"extortionate - it's unbelievable how much it costs to fill a tank these days"*. The rising cost of fuel means that deliveries of food etc to rural areas is more expensive, which in turn puts up the prices for those living there. Similarly the cost of delivering goods to the islands of Scotland - when companies actually provide this service - is extremely high.

"Why should we have to pay more? We still live in Scotland after all."

Cuts to public services have led to huge job losses. Women account for the majority of the public sector workforce, particularly at lower and middle grade positions. This, combined with massive redundancies in the private sector, has undoubtedly contributed to the current rate of women's unemployment.

Many women still face maternity discrimination in the workplace despite legislation being in place. Returning to work after a period of maternity leave is often very difficult, with roles changing and less responsibility being given.

Access to Modern Apprenticeship schemes is limited and heavily gender streamed, with young women taking up roles in childcare, hairdressing, beauty etc. whereas young men predominate in construction, engineering, joinery etc.

Education and Lifelong Learning

Young women continue to be streamed into 'traditional' subjects and are not encouraged to pursue science, technology and maths. With the current investment and employment prospects in the renewable sector, participation in these subjects by young women is essential to ensure equality of opportunity in the workplace.

Modern Apprenticeship opportunities are limited in many areas of the country. Apprenticeships are often gender-specific, with young women taking up careers in areas such as childcare and hairdressing.

For many young women, information about Modern Apprenticeship schemes is limited through careers advice in school. Careers in subjects such as engineering tend to be pursued through an academic route, i.e. a university degree. Many capable and interested young women are losing out as a result. Education and careers advice should encourage young people to explore non-traditional careers.

The SWC supports the Scottish Government's commitment that Scottish students will not have to pay university tuition fees. It must be recognised, however, that students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, require additional support in order to enter higher education.

The SWC notes that 62% of all secondary school teachers are female, but only 34% of secondary school head teachers are female. It is vital that women are not only afforded the opportunity to progress to senior levels within the teaching profession, but also that they are given the support and encouragement necessary to do so.

Patchy, inconsistent and expensive public transport, combined with a lack of accessible, affordable childcare in many areas of the country, creates barriers for women in accessing education. The Scottish Government must ensure investment to overcome these barriers.

Justice

The SWC fully supports the recommendations set out by the Commission on Female Offenders, which reported in April 2012.

Women are often sent to prison for minor offences, such as non-payment of fines. While those who commit serious crimes should be punished, it is unfair and unhelpful to imprison women with complex social needs who require rehabilitation as opposed to punishment.

“Imprisoning a woman for recurrent non-payment of fines is not justice for society as a whole or the children she may be trying to support.”

Most women who are imprisoned are sent to HMP Cornton Vale, away from family and support networks. There are other units available throughout the country - for example HP Craiginches in Aberdeen, which has a small community integration unit housing female offenders from the local area. The intention of the unit is to link them back into the community for release. This unit houses approximately 22 women and is considered “overcrowded”.

Services, such as those which assist former female offenders with literacy skills, have been removed as a result of the public service cuts. These were highly valued by the women who accessed them. It is important that the Scottish Government take the value of these services into consideration when allocating funding to assist female offenders.

As well as supporting those who are leaving or have left the prison system, it is important that initiatives are put in place for those at risk of offending or re-offending. Non-payment of fines often originates from offences relating to prostitution, for example soliciting. These women have complex needs, such as mental health issues, extreme poverty and drug and alcohol misuse problems. They require assistance through early intervention as a matter of priority.

The SWC also supports the establishment of a specialist domestic abuse court in Edinburgh. Women have commented on the effectiveness of this court with regards to empathy and the time it takes to process cases. The SWC would encourage the Scottish Government to consider further establishment of such services in more areas of the country.

Rural Affairs and the Environment

Due to the rural nature of Scotland's geography, there is a distinct lack of investment in employment opportunities within the regions. Tourism is a major attraction, with women often relying on part-time, seasonal or low paid work in this sector.

Local Authorities and the National Health Service (NHS) are major employers within rural Scotland. The current loss of public sector jobs is having a detrimental impact on the women employed to provide necessary local services.

“The public sector employs 40% of workers in this region. The majority of these are women. It stands to reason we will be the most likely to feel the repercussions of policy decisions.”

High speed broadband connections are reported by women as a significant provision lacking in rural areas. Small, remote businesses with poor transport links need to rely on internet services to promote and conduct business activities. Some areas of rural Scotland have no access to broadband resulting in restricted business opportunities. In areas where internet services are provided, an absence of internet provider competition results in rural communities enjoying less competitive tariffs than those in urban areas.

“Lack of high speed broadband limits so many social and business opportunities as slow internet connection stops people working from home and being able to shop online.”

Poor or non-existent internet provision not only impedes the business community but also access to education and employment opportunities for women. On-line application forms are invited by employers and academic institutions attracting applicants. Distance learning, home study and accredited workplace training are all curtailed for women by a lack of reliable, affordable and accessible internet services.

“Lack of high speed broadband is also a major disadvantage in terms of applying for jobs, with more and more organisations accepting online applications only”

Infrastructure and Capital Investment

Transport

Transport is seen as both limited and expensive in many parts of Scotland. A lack of accessible and reliable public transport often results in women purchasing cars, which they cannot afford. This is particularly the case in rural areas. The geography of Scotland requires investment in a stronger, more integrated public transport system, particularly with regards to timetabling, access and provision.

Public transport concentrates on journeys to and from main centres and is not focused on the requirements of communities. Women travelling into towns are often restricted in attending appointments, going shopping etc due to poor service provision.

“Transport is extremely limited. Councils are doing away with many of the service buses. This will leave some people unable to connect with other runs to work or to go shopping etc”.

Limited bus services are a further barrier for women accessing employment and education. Restricted timetables make travel completely unworkable for women attempting to access learning, employment and childcare opportunities.

Rising fuel costs are having an adverse impact on communities in Scotland. As well as affecting day to day travel, high fuel prices also impact on business activity. The cost of transporting goods or providing services results in increased costs to the end user. Women, finding it difficult to access employment within their own community, travel long distances to work, often for little financial benefit.

“It’s shocking that the cost of fuel inhibits travel outwith a restricted area. As a part-time worker I can only afford to travel the three days a week. I have to work. Five days would be costly not only for fuel but for car maintenance.”

The Scottish Government Concessionary Travel scheme is welcomed, however, women are often unable to make use of their ‘free bus pass’ as there are simply no buses on which to use it.

Much of rural Scotland relies on ferry provision to take residents to and from the mainland in order to access services, education and employment. An absence of suitable waiting areas at ferry terminals, coupled with a lack of cohesion between bus and ferry providers, can mean long waits between journeys. Women’s safety then becomes threatened.

“At certain times when ferries arrive there is no bus available. This puts a great deal of pressure on islanders to be reliant on cars and can also put women in a very vulnerable position.”

Tourism, a major attraction and employer in Scotland, is also threatened by the lack of accessible transport provision. Island communities rely on visitors to support their employment and economic activities. Reliable and cohesive transport provision is vital to ensure sustainable work for islanders.

Housing and Regeneration

There is a lack of social housing in Scotland. The Scottish Government has pledged to build 30,000 new affordable homes over the life of the current Parliament. No information however has been provided regarding the amount that will be built in urban and in rural areas. There can be difficulties in building social housing in rural areas due to location and availability of housing providers.

Concerns are frequently raised about the shortage of starter homes for young people and families. While the Scottish Government’s Shared Equity scheme is praised, not enough mixed-use housing is being created, with the majority of new properties built with only one or two bedrooms. There is also a shortage of accommodation for the elderly and disabled in more remote areas of the country.

Allocation processes for social housing are considered to be *“arbitrary and inconsistent”*, particularly in areas such as the Highlands. Highland Council covers a very large area and local communities often feel their housing needs are not being met.

“Local affordable housing for local people should be priority, not first come first served on a nationwide housing list”

The ‘right-to-buy’ scheme for social housing has left a *“lasting and damaging legacy”* on housing provision. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 abolished the right to buy for new tenants and new supply properties. It is expected this legislation will assist in alleviating accommodation shortages. The SWC fully support the Scottish Government’s plans to abolish the ‘right to buy’ for all tenants.

The unpredictability of the social housing market, combined with a lack of suitable accommodation, means many families have to turn to increasingly expensive private lets. Families can also be forced to move away from relatives and support networks in order to find suitable accommodation, which leads to communities shrinking.

“A lot of the cheaper properties have been bought up by landlords who rent out at overly inflated prices”.

The proposed changes to Housing Benefit under UK Coalition Government Welfare Reform proposals have been described as *“a financial assault on women”*. Many women are beginning to worry about the housing costs they will have to pay if changes are implemented.

At present, housing benefit is paid directly to the landlord. Women do not, therefore, have to worry about budgeting this money into household incomes as they are not in direct receipt of it. Under the Welfare Reform Act 2012, housing benefit will come under the wider Universal Credit. This will be paid monthly in arrears, which will force women to completely change the way they manage their budgets. This could be detrimental to a number of women, particularly those who are not used to having large sums of money at one time. Spending more than they normally would on a weekly basis is a strong possibility, leaving them with little of their benefit left towards the end of the month. The Scottish Government must ensure help and support is made available to the thousands of families who will be affected by these changes.

Summary

As women make up the majority of the public sector workforce, use public transport, are streamed into specific subjects in school, access NHS services and face numerous barriers in attempting to access employment, gender considerations must be made in every area of Scottish Government budgets. The current economic climate, coupled with sweeping changes to welfare benefits and tax credits, has undoubtedly had a disproportionate affect on women.

Without a full analysis of the effects public spending, the economic position and wellbeing of women will be undermined. The contribution made by women to the country’s economic growth must not be devalued.