



## Your Scotland, Your Referendum

May 2012

### *Introduction*

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.

### *SWC Evidence Source*

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including roadshow events, thematic conferences and regional contact groups.

As part of our roadshow programme for 2012 we will ask women throughout Scotland:

*"There has been discussion recently regarding a referendum on the future of Scotland. Do you have enough information to make an informed decision and use your vote on this important issue?"*

As the SWC has yet to consult with women on the referendum on Scotland's future, a response to this consultation is limited. There are, however, aspects of the proposals which are relevant to issues raised by women during previous consultations.

The SWC held a Conference, Women and Their Vote, on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2012. The purpose of the event was to raise awareness of Local Government elections and explain the Single Transferrable Vote system.

A key emerging theme is that many women do not use their vote for a number of reasons. These include being unsure of voting procedures, being disengaged from candidates and political parties as well as a general uncertainty about and apathy towards going to the polling station to cast a vote. The low turnout at recent Local Government elections highlights this.

Women need to be provided with relevant information about the importance of using their vote in the referendum. Guidance should make clear what the outcomes would be if Scotland became "*an independent country*", as well as the implications of 'devo-max' (should it be decided that a second question is necessary on the ballot paper).

If women are not provided with appropriate accessible material, they may consider the referendum unimportant or irrelevant and will not vote. This could lead to a low turnout resulting in the views of many in Scotland not being considered.

Proposals to produce factual leaflets regarding the process of the referendum are welcomed. This information must be presented in a clear and accessible manner. While having "*comprehensive factual information*" available on the internet is undoubtedly important, this must not be relied upon as a main resource. High speed broadband is unavailable in many remote rural parts of Scotland, where it is often seen as a luxury rather than a necessity. Recent cuts to public services mean that libraries, often the only source of local internet access, have restricted opening times or are closed altogether. The result of this referendum will impact on each and every household in Scotland. Information must be provided in a format which is accessible to all.

The SWC intends to engage with women over the course of the next year regarding this important decision for Scotland's constitutional future. Feedback from the events will be provided. The organisation also proposes to work with other organisations in civic Scotland to ensure a strong gender perspective informs the final outcome.