

Dundee Roadshow Report

**Mental
Health**

Childcare

**Low
Paid**

Disability

Work

**Social
Security**

**Public
Services**

Caring

Pensions

Schools

**Welfare
Reform**

Wednesday 31st October

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Introduction

The Scottish Women's Convention held roundtable discussions at the Queens Hotel in Dundee on 31st October in order to gauge issues which are important for local women. A number of points were raised throughout the day which affected Dundee and surrounding areas at both a local and national level. The work and community spirit of women to their communities cannot be underestimated. Policy makers should be aware of both the structural and societal barriers that impact on women's inequality by incorporating their views and experiences.

Legislation and policy have a profound impact on every part of women's lives as well as those of their families. The SWC, in conducting the roadshow programme in local areas throughout Scotland, allows women to provide cohesive and adaptable solutions to the issues raised in order to transform the policy making agenda. Housing, the steep rise in mental health issues and ongoing welfare reform should be seen as priority problems in the landscape of women's issues.

Failure to include the voices of women in the policy making process denigrates not only their experiences, but also links back to a systematic disassociation to fully work on equality for women of all ages and backgrounds. This report showcases the real situations faced by women everyday in a unique setting for both local and national policymakers. It also encourages women at a primary level to become more involved as well as extolling the advantages of qualitative evidence from people who are most acutely affected by policy decisions but are often not part of the process.

The SWC extends a warm thanks to all the women who attended on the day.



6 Main Points from Dundee Roadshow:

- **Rise in mental health issues with long waiting times for both women and children**
- **Difficulties in securing G.P. appointments, often leading to queues**
- **Inequalities in the increase of Women's State Pension age and the impacts of this**
- **High private rent and shortage of accessible social housing**
- **Lack of access for women with disabilities impacting on all aspects of life including employment and education**
- **Prevalence of child poverty and rise in the need for food banks**

Question One

Due to gendered inequality, women continue to face increasing financial pressure due to a number of issues, including: welfare reform, gender segregation in the workplace, lack of female representation publicly. Cuts to services have seen many positions reduced from full to part time or removed completely. Reforms such as the Tax Credit Two Child Limit – “rape clause” – and pension inequality are specifically targeted at women, often with little or no notice. Women often undertake low paid, low skilled jobs on a part-time basis, with little opportunity for training and development. Not only does this contribute to the gender pay gap, but more often than not pays poorly and is looked on as of very little value.

Have these issues impacted at a local level on access to health and social care services, availability of education and employment opportunities? How have the changes affected local women and communities?

Caring

“Women are carers. We just get on with it.”

The fact that women carry out multiple caring roles is nothing new, however, this is still undervalued despite the amount of money it saves the economy year on year. The commitment by women to look after elderly parents, children and grandchildren is to be commended.

In addition to this responsibility, other unavoidable commitments, such as employment, lead to many issues for carer’s themselves. This is seen as a *“balancing act”* that is precarious but must be struggled through. Restrictions on Carer’s Allowance, such as the demands to only work certain hours for certain income amounts make leaving a job impossible yet still having to be a carer full time. Despite the welcome of the £10 top up for this particular type of social security by the Scottish Government under new powers, the remuneration is still so low that women are basically forced into working.

“Caring really is a second job but it’s not seen as such – you have to work to pay for the care support, so it’s double discrimination for women. We’re financially worse off and it’s not our fault.”

Aside from the economical problems, there are a variety of physical and mental issues that are just as pressing for female carers. Women discussed just *“having to put up and get on with it”* even when they have been extremely ill. Many spoke of feeling unsupported and the extreme toll this has had on their mental health.

Key Issues

- Economical issues around caring
- Lack of flexibility in workplaces for carers
- Physical and mental health problems for carers with no respite
- Lack of awareness around older women caring full time

“There is a feeling of just wanting to run, but you can't because you are responsible for another human beings life basically. There is the sheer toll and then the guilt you feel in those times when find yourself wishing you didn't have to do this. It is unbelievable traumatic. The thoughts that go through your head are indescribable.”

Women also spoke about worries regarding older women who care for the likes of disabled children who were now in their thirties and forties. This was seen as *“never a priority”* despite the toll this can play on these women. Additionally, young carers under the age of eighteen were seen as needing added respite and many noted the fear of them not experiencing a childhood. Support plans and respite should be adaptable to take into account the needs of the individual.

“Who cares for the carers?”

Key Requirements:

- Additional services and respite for carers
- Assessments of carer's mental health to be a key priority
- Support work to be proactive not reactive
- Assessments and extended support plans tailored individually for all carer's across age ranges

Education and Youth

Mental health issues are on the rise in children, exemplified by exposure to social media and ongoing moves to digitalisation. This is also seen as a major contributor to the likes of bullying with one person being targeted by a large number of children.

Contribution to sharing the likes of self harm and disorders such as anorexia on influential online platforms was seen as commonplace nowadays amongst young women. Not only is this extremely brutal on children but their parents also. Parents find themselves under enormous pressure trying to deal with these issues,.

Further and higher education in Dundee is seen as extremely valuable, with many women citing both the college and university has having expanded over the past few years in terms of the courses they offer.

Key Issues:

- A lack of young women's uptake in STEM subjects
- The prioritisation of university education as opposed to other options
- Lack of domestic subjects for children of all ages
- A need to prioritise education around inclusivity and social media

These were seen as especially valuable in terms of retention of younger generations, encouraging them to study close to home. This was also seen as giving valuable service to mature students seeking qualifications.

Whilst strides have been made in expanding uptake of traditionally-male dominated subjects within the realm of education for girls, it is felt that more could be done. Whilst this is recognised as being tackled at an educational level, women report this going much deeper - including young girls feeling intimidated in a class full of adolescent males as well as sexual harassment and bullying. Promotion of female technical teachers and mentorships was seen as a good remedy for this in order to aid encouragement and development.

The emphasis placed on university education as opposed to the likes of Modern Apprenticeships is seen to be a recurring problem. Many girls who do not go to University tend to look for jobs in the likes of hairdressing and childcare, rather than being encouraged into apprenticeships in more male dominated professions. More encouragement is needed at schools to show girls that they are able to do any job. Mentors and role models would allow girls to think about entering the occupations predominantly done by men.

“Consecutive Governments have made academic success their goal. Some children are not academic and steps should be taken at a Government level to look at setting up Apprentice Schemes with the involvement of companies.”

Schools should have mandatory domestic courses available to all pupils which include financial budgeting which will have benefits in adult life. More also must be undertaken in terms of sexual education in order to communicate to young women issues around consent. A major problem in terms of teenage pregnancy stems from young women’s lack of knowledge around relationships and sexual awareness.

“Love and sex should be separated in order to teach young girls that it is not the same thing. This is so much worse now with smartphones and girls feeling under pressure to send naked pictures of themselves to boys who then share it around.”

Key Recommendations:

- Coordinated training for parents around social media and mental health
- Early interventions and coordinated responses for children's mental health including education in school
- Joined up approaches with businesses to showcase opportunities and career mentoring
- sessions on value of work and employment for women as well as representation in public life
- Lack of aspiration and deprivation in young women. Teen pregnancy: no job models, need education and raising awareness.

Employment

Key Issues Raised:

- Lack of promotions for women to senior positions
- The complexities of precarious contracts
- Key discrimination against women with other protected characteristics such as disabilities

Many noted that the investment in the Arts within Dundee has offset the decline in the manufacturing industry and has been extremely welcomed. This was also seen as quite imperative in that it implied a loss of skill in terms of a shift away from skilled trades to more routine employment in the likes of hospitality and retail, leaving many people without a trade.

“Hard working women who worked in our factories, some being the main breadwinners have been left behind.”

A major point raised is the continuing growth in wealth distribution both at a local and national level due to widening differentiations in employment and work. Encouraged by the likes of zero hour's contracts and gendered segregation, many women noted that it is not just the gender pay gap that women have to contend with, but also the class divide and a generational gap in wealth.

“It's young people that suffer on zero hours contracts. We can barely afford rent and people actually ask us why we haven't been sensible enough to put a deposit down on a house?”

Access to employment for disabled women is a major problem. Jobs that many are best suited are situated in inaccessibility buildings. Double discrimination in terms of LGBT and BME women is often seen as common in employment. There appears to be a stigma with some made to feel uncomfortable, notably in male dominated environments where sexuality is often commented on with many feeling unable to raise this as it is done in such a casual manner.

“There's so many folds to discrimination that all need to be highlighted. You're a woman, you have knowledge, and yet you're still discriminated against.”

Key Recommendations:

- Government drives for the private sector to raise awareness around gender diversity across all positions in employment
- Strategies to help drive uptake for more young women into male dominated fields in terms of employment
- Education for employers around the merits of a diverse workforce
- Awareness raising of discriminatory procedures and workplace rights including trade union access
- Workshops that are accessible for women on coaching and mentorships for jobs

Social Security and Poverty

Key Issues:

- Allocation of social security for children being stigmatised
- Pressure on women with health issues to work despite the detriment to their health
- Stigmatisation of poverty

Much was discussed in terms of social security, ongoing cuts and welfare reform. The current system has been described as a “minefield”. The disproportionate impact that this is having on women – *“solely for being women”* - and the painting of those desperately in need of social security as being scroungers is common.

No where is this more glaring, than in the two child tax credit limit. Child tax credit is seen as a benefit solely to help mothers however, the move to one payment households under the Universal Credit system is changing this. It makes it look like a scrounge on society rather than as a way of helping children.

“Basically, what they are saying is you should only have two children, then what? Be sterilised. It’s social engineering.”

Work done by food banks in and around the area is seen as *“awe-inspiring”*, showcasing great resilience and community spirit. Despite the economic climate and the soaring rise in usage of these, work continues. There is, however, a stigma still attached to food inequality. Many admit to going hungry rather than seeking help.

Food which is high in fat and salt tends to be a lot cheaper when compared to fresh, healthier options.

“It’s not that you don’t want to be healthy, it’s that you can’t afford it. You can’t afford it for you or your children, then you feel guilty and that you’re a bad mother.”

Parents are having to give up work because of cuts to disabled services in order to accommodate their children’s needs. This can lead to difficult positions financially where they struggle to pay for additional help with a reduced income, face insecurity due to threats of sanctioning and have little left for savings. Many reported being tired of asking for help and struggling on due to the lack of joined up support in terms of social security.

Key Issues:

- Continue to push for the removal of the ongoing welfare reforms
- Awareness raising to the public of the impact of cuts specifically to women
- Continue to push the idea of extolling social security as a basic human right as a citizen in both education and beyond
- Funding to help with healthier, cheaper options for women and families
- More education and awareness raising of how social security works for the general public

Women's Representation

Until societal and cultural stigma is negated, opportunities in areas such as employment and representation will never be equalised at a gender level. Sexual harassment, bullying based on gender and idealistic imagery portraying the perfect woman were discussed as factors discouraging women in the workplace and decision making.

Key Issues:

- Continuing stereotypes of male-dominated politics
- Lack of confidence for many women
- Issues around flexibility for women in terms of caring if standing for office

Discussions focused on the idealistic imagery concept that a female goes through at all stages of her life - from a young girl moving through to adulthood as the perfect wife and mother and even in later stages as a good housewife that takes on caring burdens of parents and grandchildren. This imagery is seen as tiring with many commenting on feeling like a failure because of this portrayal.

Politics is viewed as more of a *“who you know”* culture. There are hardly any women on the Council – the fact that being a Councillor is a part-time position and as such attracts lower wages puts many women off.

There are a number of barriers to increasing political engagement, particularly in younger women, who feel shut out of the process. Due to the added commitments which women have outwith the stereotypical 9 to 5 day (eg caring responsibilities) flexibility needs to be considered in terms of meetings times etc.. It was felt putting procedures in place such as job sharing and adjustable hours for this could help.

“It is a case of empowering women. We are protected in law – or so they say, but there is still culture and society of misogyny that needs to be outrooted.”

“Equality is two steps forward and four steps back”

Key Recommendations:

- More resources around education and politics for women
- Promotion of mentorships to increase confidence
- Initiatives to increase community engagement for women
- Education resources to extoll Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) to men and women including misogynistic language.
- Awareness raising at a local and national level of real women and their stories.

Pensions

The rise in State Pension Age with little warning for many women born in the 1950s has forced many women in this age bracket into low paid work, often part time or in two jobs whilst caring for a family and sick or elderly relatives.

“1950s women: We worked longer, had childcare issues, pushed for equality. Nothing has changed in terms of equality. They have just changed the goalposts.”

Key Issues:

- Caring imbalances
- The risk to health for those having to continue in work
- Financial penalties for women due to pension inequalities

The fallout and impact of having not received the State pension is indescribable and momentous. Not only is this felt in full economic terms such as the actual elimination of the state pension, it also decries benefits from the likes of discounts on social activities such as gym memberships. Added to this, is access to eligibility to qualify for the likes of winter fuel payments. There is a vast number of women that rely solely on state pension due to having little to no private one.

The work which older women undertaken is often stereotypically 'women's work'. For example, paid caring involves a large amount of physical exertion and gets harder as a woman gets older. It can also lead to numerous health problems. This is described as a “false economy” because women are costing the NHS more in terms of treating health conditions .

“There are women becoming destitute as a result of pension inequalities despite all they've given to society.”

“Women are living longer but we're not living in good health because we've had to work for so long.”

Key Recommendations:

- Lack of financial remuneration ring fenced for women affected.
- “Top up” benefits for social security.
- Raising awareness for women affected at both a local and national level, including pointing to coordinated campaigns.

Health and Social Care

Key issues:

- Stigma around mental health
- Impact of digitalisation on the health of young women
- Shortage of female doctors
- Lack of anonymity around violence against women in all its forms
- Social isolation

Ninewells Hospital in Dundee is one of only a handful in Scotland that continues to charge for car parking due to privatisation. This is an additional stress for people who have to visit hospital frequently with ill parents or children. Charges have recently increased. There is at present another decade under the current scheme.

Transportation links to Ninewells Hospital is seen as a huge issue. Buses are needed for older people and those who cannot afford cars. One example is the current move to bring appointments

in on a Sunday at the hospital in order to meet demand. Whilst in theory this is a great initiative, it is obviously not designed with Sunday bus and transport links in mind.

In some areas of Dundee, the Council have started using minibuses that transport disabled children to and from school to take disabled people to places locally, such as the doctors, pharmacy and shops. This is seen as a really positive thing, but could also benefit from being rolled out in the evenings to allow for more social interaction.

There are a number of language barriers when accessing healthcare services for BME women. As well as misinterpretation, staff are unable to identify other potential vulnerabilities or they may not feel in a safe enough position to disclose information meaning this could potentially leave them vulnerable.

Within Dundee and the surrounding area, a number of doctors surgeries have closed meaning many women are waiting longer for appointments. There are transport difficulties for those most vulnerable who may have to travel further distances now in order to access care and appointments regularly. This is seen as a postcode lottery, with many noting that it depends on the area in which one lived whether or not their G.P. access is sufficient.

Queues are being commonplace outside surgeries in order to access an appointment. The normal practice of phoning and enquiring about appointments in the morning was seen as unable to work as surgeries are saturated. This is described as “long and arduous” with many women noting they have to keep going back over and over again just to get an appointment due to high patient demand.

“It’s the impact on current and new patients at these surgeries.”

Suicide rates are seen as growing steeply. There is an emphasis on the need to deter individual's from social isolation. Doctors are often quick to place people on medication, especially young people, rather than use a holistic approach. This can lead to dependency and a cycle of addiction. It can also lead to a tick box exercise involving repeat prescriptions.

Drug use is a rising problem in Dundee with some of the highest rates in Europe. Scotland in general needs to take a gendered approach to drug use and isolate the problem in order to understand how addiction and gender are intertwined. Addictions have to be seen as a health issue, not a criminal one and one in which preventative measures are put in place.

"We need to help people, not criminalize something that is used as a means of escape."

Key Recommendations:

- Improvement of access to language and interpreters for BME women including training to notice potential added vulnerabilities of those with language barriers.
- Advances and incentives to increase GP recruitment and retention
- Expansion in the use of technology for ease of access to health and social care services, including awareness of those not technologically literate or individuals who do not have internet access.
- Joined up approaches to healthcare including incorporation of transport access as a socio economic duty in order to prevent unequal distribution of services shunning the most vulnerable.
- More awareness of mental health including work to tackle stigmatisation and highlight adverse experience.
- Awareness raising of support groups in and around the area including sign posting by health professionals to third sector organisations
- Accessible treatment for those with addictions that encompasses all issues including mental health and adverse childhood experiences that does not stigmatise

Question Two

The Scottish Government has made a commitment to invest in housing over the lifetime of this Parliament. Lack of quality, affordable homes whether for rent or to buy is a major issue. Decent accommodation has a positive impact on women and children's health and wellbeing, training and employment opportunities, as well as the benefit of social integration. Rising living and rent costs have led many women into rent arrears or eviction. The SWC is undertaking work around homelessness and housing for women throughout Scotland.

What are the key priorities in your area around housing and living costs? What should the Scottish Government be doing to help women and their families?

Key Issues:

- Lack of retribution for "rogue" landlords
- Imbalance in conditions of housing
- New homes being built away from amenities such as schools and local transport links
- Limited competition in the private rental market leading to high prices
- Inaccessibility of social housing in terms of women with disabilities
- High waiting lists
- Limited services for those facing repossession and rent arrears

Housing access is seen as unequally distributed. Women reported being on a housing waiting list for over twenty years . In addition, women are allocated homes in areas where the houses do not fit their needs and may move them away from communities, families and schools.

Access for women who are disabled or whose families have disabilities was a pressing issue. Disabled children in high rise flats have been told to wait years for house despite condition deteriorating.

"They build houses but often these are not accessible for disabled people. Especially if you have children."

Repossession and rent arrears can be a constant worry for many women. This, coupled with welfare reform and unpredictable income due to the likes of zero hours contracts can put women under unimaginable stress.

"The way housing is done can remove your family networks, it means having to take two buses to see those you rely on the most."

There is a common agreement that the private sector is less secure than social housing. Many women, however, are forced into these homes at extortionate rates due to the lack of social housing that is deserving of them. The likes of rolling contracts and bad conditions are cited as illustrating the desperate need for increased legislation and enforcement of rogue landlords.

“People are living in conditions whereby the house requires upgrading but they are reluctant to complain to private landlords in case they are evicted.”

“Everyone knows there’s just not enough Council Housing in Scotland, never mind Dundee”

Demand for housing means that homes are often built in areas that have little infrastructure e.g. schools, transport links

“There is not a huge issue of people presenting as homeless in Dundee. The issue here is hostel accommodation and how appropriate it is”

Women presenting as homeless due to the likes of abuse and having to flee their family home are given help and advice from local refuges such as Women’s Aid.

“There is no humanity in the Benefits System. Welfare goes hand in hand with homelessness and housing issues. ”

Youth Homelessness is a pressing issue. Many, but especially young people, are not sure where exactly to turn if they are presenting as homeless. This is especially concerning if they are not in touch with third sector organisations or have just been made homeless quickly due to disputes with a parent, for instance. A more holistic approach is thought to be needed rather than seeing just someone getting a house as the end point without taking account of long term needs.

Key Recommendations:

- Strategies to turn empty council owned buildings into community properties.
- Strategies to tackle housing problems to take into account issues such as access to schools and transport.
- Increasing regulatory mechanisms around the private rental market.
- Property that is in good condition should be more widely showcased for those looking to move.
- Interrogate housing list and criteria when assessing housing needs for community.
- Services to follow integrated and joined up approach rather than people being past from pillar to post.

Question Three

The new V and A museum has recently opened in Dundee. This, along with the waterfront development, has seen Dundee in the spotlight over the past few months.

Has this development offered employment opportunities to women? Is this a positive change for the people of Dundee? How have communities reacted to the new investment?

Increased business interest is seen as being generated through the creation of the Victoria and Albert Museum which is hoped to bring more employment prospects to the city. It is also hoped to ensure local people are attracted to use the facilities as well. For instance, linking up with schools in the area to provide educational experiences.

“The V&A will be good for Dundee. It will attract people to the city.”

A key thought is the refurbishment of the Conference Centre within Dundee in order to link up with the V and A. In connection with the museum, it is thought an integrated approach to both to maximize the potential of Dundee should be used as well as having the added benefit of attracting more bands and conferences to Dundee.

“This was a vision for Dundee. 30 years in the making. It is opening up the waterfront and housing is starting to be built.”

Question Four

What are the key priorities for women in your local area?

- Increase in representation of women at a local and national level to reflect the true diversity of Dundee
- A raised awareness for women across all backgrounds of what is going on in their community and how they can voice their concerns
- More diversity in employment
- More publicity of educational opportunities for women including flexibility for the likes of childcare
- Increased social opportunities for young people.
- A new Conference Centre to attract bands and conferences.

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.

2018 Roadshow Programme:

Stornoway

Dundee

Paisley

Kilmarnock

SWC 2018 Conferences:

Sexual Harassment

Health

Homelessness and
Housing

Copies of reports from SWC roadshows, conferences and consultation responses are available to download from our website

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The SWC is funded by the Scottish Government to communicate and consult with women in Scotland in order to influence public policy.