



# Motherwell Roadshow Report

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) believes that cuts to local public services as well as changes to welfare benefit and tax credit systems are having a profound impact on women.

Women need to become more involved in discussions around the justice system and the referendum on the future of Scotland.

Our 2012 Roadshow programme gives women the opportunity to discuss these topics in more detail providing an insight into how these issues are having an effect on them, their families and communities.

Agnes Tolmie  
Chair SWC

The SWC arranged a consultation event at the GLO Centre in Motherwell on Wednesday 5th September 2012. A cross section of women from the surrounding areas attended. The purpose of this event was to discuss issues which are relevant in Scotland at the moment, including the impact of public sector cuts and welfare reform, women and the justice system and the referendum on Scotland's future.

Recommendations will be given to the Scottish Government, as well as local politicians, on behalf of the women.

In order to obtain the relevant information for this report, the following procedures were used:

- **Flyers advertising the event were distributed throughout the town and surrounding areas.**
- **The SWC produced a set of questions which would create discussion around the issues.**
- **Discussions were facilitated by SWC staff and volunteers at the event.**
- **Notes taken throughout the process and quotes obtained from women attending form the basis of this report.**

**Over the past 12 months, Scotland has seen cuts to local public services as well as changes to welfare benefit and tax credit systems. In what way are these having an impact on you/your family?**

### **Cuts to Services**

Local Authority budgets have been slashed. Full-time jobs are frequently becoming part-time, job-share or are removed altogether. Women make up the majority of Local Authority employees and are therefore most affected by these changes. In many cases two out of three jobs have been cut, leaving one person do the work of three.

While funding for basic services such as education and health are essential, resources must also be made available for libraries, community centres etc. These are of vital importance to communities and the people who use them.

*“They aren't luxuries, they're necessities. These centres and the groups that use them keep people going. They're a life source.”*

These services are particularly valued by older people and those with mental health issues, who value the chance to be involved in their own communities.

Carers are feeling the harsh end of public service cuts. For example, older women looking after middle-aged children with Down's Syndrome face increased pressure as a result of reductions in the care packages they receive. Day centre hours are also continually being cut.

*“Too many women are having to undertake unpaid caring responsibilities. It's not right.”*

## Transport

Public transport services between town centres are considered good and well used. However services outwith main centres into smaller towns and villages is *“really bad”*.

*“Buses stop everywhere, services only run until certain times of night and they are restricted at weekends. There are so many villages in Lanarkshire that have bad bus services.”*

Buses are only able to accommodate two buggies, two wheelchairs or one of each at a time. Women can be left waiting at bus stops for long periods of time if there is no space when the bus arrives, particularly in villages.

The new NL Leisure Complex, situated at the old Ravenscraig steelworks in Motherwell, is not serviced by public transport.

*“So many things are set up for car owners and drivers”*

There is a small community bus which runs to the centre, however passengers must register to use it. The service also only runs during the day when people are at school and work. The lack of transport restricts the ability of those who do not have a car to use this new sports facility.

## Welfare Reform

Changes to benefits under the Welfare Reform Act 2010 will have a detrimental effect on many women. Under the new structures, Disability Living Allowance (DLA) will be replaced by Personal Independence Payment (PIP). Claimants who currently receive DLA will not automatically be entitled to PIP. Lack of correspondence regarding the new system has left some women scared to ask when they will be invited to apply for PIP in case they are forced to look for work when they are not able to do so.

*“These changes are attacking the vulnerable. So much stress is being placed upon disabled people and there’s no dignity in the way it’s being done.”*

There is a lack of tailored support for those who are returning to work after long periods away from the labour market. This can lead to added anxiety, particularly for women with mental health issues, whose conditions can be exacerbated as a result of additional stress.

Support for disabled workers is also vital. The closure of Remploy factories throughout the country is of great concern.

*“Not all of the workers in these factories will be able to go into mainstream employment but they want to work. They need help to be able to do it.”*

It can be very difficult to access benefits. Appointments at job centres must be made via prior phone call to a chargeable number. The call can take anything up to forty minutes to complete.

The Blue Badge Parking Scheme is administered by Local Authorities. This ‘passported benefit’ - so called because qualification arises from receipt of another benefit - is well used and relied upon. Some Local Authorities are now charging approximately a £20 fee to register the badge.

*“It’s not fair that in some parts of Scotland it’s free and it’s not in others. £20 might not seem like much but it’s a lot to pay out in one go when you are on benefits.”*

The requirement for lone parents to start looking for work once their youngest child reaches the age of five is considered *“horrifying”*. There are many barriers to this which have not yet been considered, such as the cost of paying for childcare, any other caring responsibilities and the work women will be forced to do.

**Women are in contact with the justice system in Scotland on many levels. What services are available to support women in your community?**

Services such as Rape Crisis, Victim Support, VIA (Victim Information and Advice) and Women's Aid were recognised as invaluable sources of support.

*"Women should automatically be referred to these services if they are victims of crime."*

As public services are cut, funding for these types of organisations is reduced. It is vital they continue to receive adequate resources in order to be able to carry out the important work they do.

Families Outside, a charity which works to support the families of those involved in the criminal justice system, was also praised for its work.

Access to a solicitor is *"easy enough"*, however often they do not understand the complexities of domestic abuse and are therefore not best placed to assist. Accessing specialist domestic abuse solicitors can be very difficult. Many women are also unaware that they are free to change solicitor if they are unhappy with the advice they receive.

*"There is no huge awareness of specialist domestic abuse courts in the area."*

Many women are afraid to disclose that they have been abused. If these courts operated in more parts of the country, awareness of this type of access to justice would increase. This would, hopefully, further increase awareness of domestic abuse.

Overall, women are treated more harshly than men when it comes to sentencing, with women being *"too severely punished"* for what are often misdemeanours.

*"How many women are imprisoned for benefit fraud, for example, because she is the main claimant even when it is a couple?"*

More support is necessary for women both when they are in prison and when they are released.

**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?**

*"No. Definitely not. I don't know how we can be expected to vote if we don't know what it is we're voting for!"*

More information is required which outlines not only the consequences of becoming independent, but also what would happen under a 'devo-max' or 'devo-plus' system. Similarly, there is little information as to what would happen if full independence didn't work.

*"Would we be able to reverse the decision? This is basic information that we need."*

There is concern around the way information about the referendum is disseminated to the public. Facts are necessary and questions must be answered honestly without spin.

*"We need to cut through all the rhetoric and get to the truth. The press portrays its own view and things will be politicised one way or another."*

It is also important to hear not only from politicians, but also business people, doctors, lawyers, teachers - *"real voices of people in Scotland"*.

'Hustings' events would be welcomed, with impartial reports created as a result so that people are provided with enough information to make a decision.

School pupils in S4-S6 must be given information as most will be eligible to vote when the referendum actually takes place. Generating debate on the issue in schools in general is also important, so that younger pupils are informed as to the positive and negative aspects of independence. This is particularly important if the voting age is to be lowered. Young people may just 'vote with the crowd' if they are not given adequate levels of information.

The 'Yes' and 'No' campaigns should also consider disengaged groups, such as those with learning disabilities, who require information to be broken down so it is easier to understand what they are voting for.

*"After all, these are the people who are always most affected by political decisions."*

### **What can be done to make your area a more attractive place to live, shop and work?**

- Local shopping centres are *"dwindling"* and much more investment is needed in Motherwell. Smaller, more affluent towns have much better shops.
- Libraries are a vital community source, offering people a place to go to talk to others, gain new skills e.g. through computer courses etc.  
*"I couldn't do without my library. We need our community centres too. Please stop closing them."*
- More dog litter bins would be welcomed, with greater fines imposed on those who allow their dogs to mess on pavements etc.
- More amenities are required for people living in new housing estates. These are often built without taking transport, schools and shops into consideration.  
*"You cant take for granted that everyone is able to drive"*
- Free or low cost parking within the town centre would attract more people to shop and eat there.
- More community policing is necessary, particularly in more rural areas. Plans to close Airdrie police station at night are strongly opposed.
- The creation of more employment opportunities for women in and around Motherwell would boost the local economy significantly.
- Affordable, safe housing for women who live on their own must always be a consideration when creating new properties in the area.

## Conclusions

Following on from the discussions, women asked the SWC to submit recommendations to the Scottish Government, relevant Ministers and Representatives at all Government levels. Copies will also be distributed to Non-Governmental Organisations.



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.