

2025

ROADSHOW

Perth

June 2025



The Scottish Women's Convention

Introduction

In May 2025, the SWC Team travelled to Perth City Centre, carrying out multiple roundtables with local women. Multiple key themes arose during conversations, including **health, education, employment, and community**.

Throughout our time in Perth, women provided a generally positive outlook, promoting a strong sense of community and the availability of good quality public services. However, some issues were identified across sectors, which had resulted in poorer outcomes for citizens.

Women were critical of poor access to healthcare, highlighting long waiting lists, difficulty in organising GP appointments, and centralised secondary care services. This situation was made more difficult by continued medical misogyny and a lack of knowledge surrounding women's health. Moreover, women focused on education, stating that the increase in additional support needs, alongside the COVID-19 pandemic, had worsened the quality of education provided to young people. Poor education linked heavily with discussions surrounding employment – with women explaining that the quality and availability of work had reduced, causing mass youth scarcity. To counter this issue, women hoped for increased tourism and recreational activities, as well as the reintroduction of community spaces.

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK, and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

Health

Perth and Kinross consistently performs well at a national level across health outcomes. Women residing in Perth experience a higher-than-average life expectancy, have lower than average mortality rates from coronary heart disease and cerebrovascular disease, and report generally low anxiety levels¹. This was reflected in women's experiences, with many explaining that they were satisfied with the quality of care received. However, women did note that initial access to care could be difficult due to long waiting lists and limited primary care appointments. Women identified gynaecological and dental assessments as two areas of particular concern.

- “...I do community engagement work, and a lot of the feedback is that women are happy with the care they receive, once they get into the system”
- “Our waiting lists are awful; getting a doctor's appointment is an absolute nightmare, people can't get a dentist.”
- “Well, I had a gynae issue and I had to wait three years for an appointment...I obviously wasn't seen as high risk or as important.”

Poor public transport provision was also recognised as a barrier to healthcare access. Women pointed to the highly varied geography of Perth and Kinross, explaining that those who resided in remote villages and towns were prevented from accessing vital healthcare services. It was also explained that women could be referred to Ninewells Hospital and Medical School in Dundee when provision was not available at Perth Royal Infirmary. This was largely accounted to an increase in centralisation and a reduction in localised provision. Similar issues have been reported [across SWC Roadshows](#), such as Wick, Campbeltown, and the Isle of Skye and Kyle of Lochalsh. Women stated that the additional cost and time caused by reduced transport offerings, acted as a key barrier to healthcare.

- “...I provide support in a rural community and...we find that quite often with rural families that they're expected to travel for essential services, but they have no way of getting there.”
- “...the centralisation of healthcare to Ninewells is incredibly problematic...you're talking about an arduous journey and the stress associated with travel.”
- “There's the financial aspect of it as well, some people actually can't afford to pay for that travel.”

Women also explained that the overload experienced across the NHS discouraged them from seeking support. Women in attendance conveyed a sense of worry surrounding the NHS, explaining that they did not want to overburden staff and the wider system. Some suggested that communication methods, such as triaging at GP surgeries, actively worsened this situation further.

¹ Office for National Statistics. (2024). Local Indicators for Perth and Kinross. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/S12000048-perth-and-kinross/indicators>

- “I spoke to one woman and she had said to me when she phoned the GP which gives you this long spiel about right place, right care...all she heard was ‘go away’.”
- “...you’re so aware of how understaffed and overstretched they are that you don’t want to be a nuisance, yet it can massively affect your life.”

It was stated that the long-term impacts of healthcare avoidance would likely be significant, worsening women’s future health. This can perhaps be reflected in healthy life expectancy levels in Perth and Kinross; while women generally experience longer than average life expectancy – 82 years – when this is adjusted to consider a healthy life expectancy, it changes drastically – 61 years². This data paints a stark picture for women in Perth and Kinross, resulting in the average women living in poor health for 20 years. We would therefore argue that improved consideration of women’s health is vital in assessing localised healthcare need.

Structural medical misogyny was also considered by women. They highlighted the wider issue of reduced research into women’s bodies – it was estimated in 2020 that only 5% of global research and development funding was allocated to women’s health research, with 4% of this directed to women’s cancers and 1% for all other women-specific health conditions³. Furthermore, women provided examples where their concerns were dismissed by primary medics, namely GPs. In particular, women experiencing menopausal symptoms felt that some GPs lacked sufficient knowledge in this area.

- “...because we menstruate, they haven’t done as much medically on us, even though we’re half of the population.”
- “...if men go to the GP...I think they get taken more seriously, whereas women are seen as emotional, hormonal. They’re not taken seriously.”

Mental health also arose, with women highlighting the experiences of young people. They explained that long waiting lists for treatment contributed to poorer mental wellbeing, as did social media. Women stressed their concern surrounding social media, stating that young women were vulnerable to sexual abuse and online bullying. They proposed increased regulation across online platforms, with a particular emphasis on the impact of online behaviours on mental wellbeing and online safety mechanisms.

- “I know of a 12-year-old girl, who had wanted to buy ice-skating clothes online...He had said to her that to custom-make her outfit, they needed to see what her body looked like, so asked for photos of her in her underwear. She was 12, she did it”
- “There was a young woman who is having some issues with bullying and mental health, and she went online to a forum asking if she should stab herself, just really wanting reassurance, and people were telling her to do it.”

² ScotPHO. (2024). Profile: Population Health, Council Area: Perth and Kinross. Available at: https://scotland.shinyapps.io/ScotPHO_profiles_tool/

³ Jeffrey, G. (2025). Barriers to Women in Accessing Healthcare in the UK – A Review. *LSE Public Policy Review*, 3(4), pp. 1-12.

Education

Across Perth and Kinross, education levels are high – 62.7% of citizens have qualifications at SCQF level 6 and above, significantly higher than the Scottish-average of 54.4%⁴. Those residing in Perth and Kinross have access to a range of primary and secondary education locations, as well as courses at the University of the Highland and Islands. Women highlighted the positive experiences of children at primary schools, however felt mixed surrounding secondary education.

- “We have kids going through the system, and I’ve had nothing but very good experiences.”
- “I would say that primary school is good, high school is not great...I do a lot of work with families, and the kids will be in primary, they’re smaller, supportive, and then they go to high school, and you’ve got teens saying that they would rather die than go to school.”

The impact of mainstreaming policy within schools was discussed. Introduced in 2019, the presumption to provide education in a mainstream setting, aimed to give all children in Scotland the opportunity to “achieve their fullest potential”⁵. This has enabled children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) to remain within mainstream education. ASN covers a wide range of characteristics, including neurodivergence, mental health and English as a second language. Mental health was identified as a key barrier to young women’s participation at school, with a lack of support contributing to poor outcomes. Within Perth and Kinross, 6,000 school-age children were assessed as having ASN, however only 350 support staff were identified across the region⁶. It was suggested that through increased staffing numbers, all children could be supported more effectively across schools.

- “We’ve got a massive increase in young people being referred into the pupil support system...Something needs to change in education, because it’s not working”
- “A few years ago, when they got rid of the special schools, and it’s all mainstream, that’s not worked.”
- “...my son went to a primary school where there are a large percentage of children with ASN, and he didn’t have those needs...I felt that he wasn’t pushed enough because the teachers were so distracted with other children.”

Women also explained that the rigidity of schooling systems prevented easy practical solutions to issues faced by children with ASN. Examples such as altering timetables or seating arrangements were provided. Yet, strict policies around academic achievement, worked as a barrier to those struggling to attend school. Women instead

⁴ NOMIS. (2024). Labour Market Profile – Perth and Kinross. Available at: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157428/printable.aspx>

⁵ Scottish Government. (2019). Guidance on the Presumption to Provide Education in a Mainstream Setting. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-presumption-provide-education-mainstream-setting/documents/>

⁶ Perth and Kinross Council. (2024). Education Service Improvement Plan 2024/25. Available at: https://www.pkc.gov.uk/media/53205/PKC-Education-and-Learning-Improvement-Plan-2024-2025/pdf/PKC_Education_and_Learning_Improvement_Plan_2024-2025.pdf?m=1725889158530

believed empowering children with ASN to enter schools as a priority was key in tackling issues such as mental ill health or low academic achievement. This would align with commitments made by the Scottish Government within the mainstreaming policy, to take a human-rights based approach. Through this approach, education providers can focus on individual need, centring young women across their learning plan.

- “Like there are things [schools] can do, like maybe don’t sit them next to a particular pupil, maybe take one class off their timetable which gives them more flexibility and confidence in their other classes, but no. I mean, the priority should be getting these kids into school”

Women also pointed to the recent COVID-19 pandemic as significantly impacting young women’s educational experiences. They explained that national lockdowns contributed to sense of social anxiety and loneliness. Directly after the pandemic, it was estimated that Perth and Kinross struggled to return to pre-COVID functionality. The Perth and Kinross Economic Journal reported that between 2019 and 2022, the number of social security claimants increased by 40.3%, one of the highest increases witnessed in Scotland⁷. This strongly suggests that households across the region have experienced financial difficulties as a direct result of the pandemic and wider global turbulence. Poverty is a widely accepted factor in the development of poor mental health and wellbeing, and with 35% of children experiencing poverty in Perth and Kinross⁸, understanding the long-term impacts of these crises is vital.

- “...my daughter has struggled, and that was more after COVID, going back after then, she’s found that very difficult.”
- “I mean, I used to work in a busy office, now I work at home, but if I ever go back in, I can’t concentrate anymore, it’s too noisy. So, for kids, they must be the same”
- “It’s that old chestnut of COVID, let’s all blame COVID, but I don’t think people fully appreciate the damage that it has done to our communities. Children, families, older people, it has had a phenomenal effect.



⁷ Perth and Kinross Economic Journal. (2022). 2021/22 Economic Data Summary. Available at: https://www.pkc.gov.uk/media/49814/Perth-Kinross-Economic-Journal-2021-22/pdf/Ec_J_Annual_202122.pdf?m=1655285409113

⁸ Perth and Kinross Council. (2024). Education Services Improvement Plan 2024/25. Available at: https://www.pkc.gov.uk/media/53205/PKC-Education-and-Learning-Improvement-Plan-2024-2025/pdf/PKC_Education_and_Learning_Improvement_Plan_2024-2025.pdf?m=1725889158530

Employment

Within Perth and Kinross, the overall employment rate is 76.8%, with 21% experiencing economic inactivity⁹. While these rates do not vary significantly from UK-averages, women highlighted that the challenges facing the local economy as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit had reduced the quality of employment. Women explained that young people were then more likely to seek work elsewhere, contributing to the wider issue of youth scarcity. The reduction in economically active individuals has further worsened the issues facing Perth City Centre, with a lack of employees resulting in closures across retail and hospitality sectors.

- “...my son is going to be 20 this year...and all his friends, they all want to move away...because they say that there’s nothing here...no jobs, social life, high street.”
- “...someone I was speaking to was saying that their daughter had gone for a job with Costa, and they couldn’t believe what they had to do to apply...it’s because so many people are going for the jobs, they need some way of whittling it down.”

A further industry suffering from the effects of youth scarcity is social care. Women explained that the sector is facing recruitment challenges, despite growing need. This has been partly facilitated through the increase in older people residing in the area; between 2001 and 2023, the number of those aged 75 and over has increased by 58.1% while the number of people aged 0 to 15 has decreased by 6.1%¹⁰. It has been estimated that this issue will continue to worsen, emphasising the need for immediate action.

Women explained that the lack of paid carers in the area, has placed increased responsibility upon them. We have regularly reported that women’s increased caring responsibilities act to prevent their full economic participation. It can be observed that 18.8% of those who are economically inactive across Perth and Kinross have stated that ‘looking after family/home’ is the primary reason why, higher than the Scottish average of 16.1%¹¹. When asked how to improve the situation within Perth, women provided multiple solutions. They asked for better conditions for paid carers, as well as increased pay, with the aim being to effectively value social care as a sector while making it an appealing career for young people.

- “It’s so common that women take up the slack, you know, women take on everything, manage the kids, then have to take on a rubbish job”
- “...I think that women will pick up the unpaid caring, but maybe not recognise it as unpaid caring.”
- “...it’s not just about increasing pay for carers; it’s about improving their conditions.”

⁹ Office for National Statistics. (2024). Local Indicators for Perth and Kinross. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/S12000048-perth-and-kinross/indicators>

¹⁰ National Records of Scotland. (2024). Perth and Kinross Council Area Profile. Available at: <https://webarchive.nrscotland.gov.uk/20241128125027/https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/council-area-data-sheets/perth-and-kinross-council-profile.html>

¹¹ NOMIS. (2024). Labour Market Profile – Perth and Kinross. Available at: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157428/printable.aspx>

Women went on to identify potential areas of development for the city. They expressed disappointment at the poor emphasis on tourism across the region, believing that the natural scenery and history of the area were untapped resources. As of 2023, tourism formed 10.3% of all businesses in Perthshire and provided employment for 13.5% of people¹². The opportunities provided by tourism have been acknowledged at a local authority level, with Perthshire Tourism Partnership releasing a Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for 2025 to 2030. This plan hopes to build on momentum created directly after the COVID-19 pandemic, with the popularity of staycations, causing a 15.4% increase in tourist numbers¹³. We propose that targeted work across Perth City Centre would enable the creation of new business, aligning with the wants of women.

- “...Perth has so much history, it could make a lot more, and you could bring the tourists in.”
- “There are loads of tourists going past us up north, and the buses stop here, so maybe if you could improve tourism in Perth, rather than just somewhere for them to pass through, maybe that would help.”
- “I don’t think [many tourists] are coming into the city, and if they did come in, then the wee independent shops would thrive, the same with the museum. You need to give people a reason.”

Additionally, in relation to tourism, women highlighted the lack of innovation witnessed which they believed could benefit citizens. They placed emphasis on the need for improved recreational activities and hospitality venues, believing that this could retain young people within the area. To further modernise Perth, we would point to the incredibly low levels of digital connectivity; Perth and Kinross has a gigabit capable broadband coverage of 44.9% compared to the national average of 83.7% and 5G coverage of only 35.3% compared to 94.2% across the UK¹⁴. Without access to comprehensive digital platforms, it is unlikely that residents and businesses in Perth can effectively function. Also, with an increased number of essential services moving to online platforms, such as social security access and healthcare provision, ensuring that all women have access to reliable digital connections is vital to improve wellbeing.

- “We do need a bit more vibrancy though, some tourism, things for the young ones to do.”
- “The leisure centre keeps breaking down, so it’s closed all the time. We don’t have a bowling alley or an ice rink or anything like that. There’s nothing for teenagers, maybe for eight- or nine-year-olds, but nothing for the older kids.”

¹² VisitScotland. (2024). Perthshire. Available at: <https://www.visitscotland.org/research-insights/regions/perthshire>

¹³ Perth and Kinross. (2024). Tourism Strategy and Action Plan. Available at:

https://www.perthcityandtowns.co.uk/datafiles/uploaded/biz_partner_doc/110-Tourism_Strategy_Action_Plan_20252030_1.pdf

¹⁴ Office for National Statistics. (2024). Local Indicators for Perth and Kinross. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/S12000048-perth-and-kinross/indicators>

Community

Women highlighted the importance of community groups and the third sector in tackling social disadvantage. They explained that the third sector was incredibly active across the region, providing essential support and that this was often supported by Perth and Kinross Council. The prioritisation of community support is partially reflected in the Council's 2025/26 budget, which commits £1 million to community resilience¹⁵.

- “...the council provide funding and actually enable these groups to happen. People might not realise that...but a lot of [support] is driven by the council.”

Some women working in the third sector did however explain that further assistance was required, particularly for service-providers. They stated that the continued use of short-term funding streams contributed to staffing and organisational difficulties. This was recognised across funding sources, with women calling for consistent, long-term funding. To further this, women emphasised the importance of flexibility across funding, stating that strict pre-determined outcomes can limit the success of projects.

- “The short-term funding is an issue, particularly non-council funding.”
- “We have 24 different funding streams...75% of referrals come from the council, but maybe about 12% of our funding is from them.”
- “By not having those really tight outcomes, we can build a service that women want, rather than what we think women want.”

Women also considered the impact of reduced community spaces in Perth. They explained that over the decades the number of community halls and libraries had decreased significantly. This was viewed negatively by women, with many stating that the loss of spaces contributed to a sense of isolation across age groups and the erosion of community cohesion. Women pointed to the power of community in improving educational and professional outcomes for those experiencing social disadvantage, while also playing an important role in tackling issues such as stigma and prejudice. Perth and Kinross ranked as third across Scotland in 2023 when gathering the prevalence of adults experiencing discrimination; 9.6%, a sharp rise from 5.4% in 2019¹⁶. Providing safe spaces where citizens can gather and share experiences, can be an effective counter to bias and prejudice. Therefore, increasing focus on community cohesion across Perth and Kinross would be a welcome addition.

- “There’s nowhere for [families] to go. In Kinross there isn’t a community space, there’s not a community hall or hub”
- “We used to have loads of [community spaces] but they’ve all closed. It’s a way of engaging with the community, getting people involved in local things.”

¹⁵ Perth and Kinross Council. (2025). Ambitious Budget Set to Empower Communities and Support the Most Vulnerable. Available at: <https://www.pkc.gov.uk/article/24455/Ambitious-budget-set-to-empower-communities-and-support-the-most-vulnerable>

¹⁶ ScotPHO. (2024). Profile: Adult Mental Health, Council Area: Perth and Kinross. Available at: https://scotland.shinyapps.io/ScotPHO_profiles_tool/

Conclusion

To conclude, while Perth and Kinross consistently rates highly across performance outcomes, issues remain. The centralisation of healthcare provision to Ninewells Hospital and Medical School in Dundee, prevents women from easily accessing vital care. This access is then worsened by discouragingly long waiting lists and medical misogyny. Young women also face an increasingly difficult educational experience, with additional needs assistance, such as mental health and neurodiversity considerations, lacking. Once entering the world of work, young women are then presented with few professional or recreational opportunities, pushing them to live elsewhere. This contributes to an ageing population, ultimately reducing the number of economically active individuals and further eroding existing services.

Yet, the third sector and community-based organisations work hard to counter these issues. Through vital service-provision and targeted support, the lives of Perth and Kinross residents is vastly improved. Additional long-term funding as well as the restoration of community spaces are required to enable efforts to continue. Find below additional recommendations, which we believe align with the wants and needs of women in Perth.

8 Key Recommendations

- Ensure all primary healthcare providers are comprehensively trained on women's health conditions, such as the menopause.
- Increase public transport provision between Perth City Centre and Ninewells Hospital and Medical School.
- Expand the number of support staff within schools, to effectively nurture pupils with ASN and the wider school community.
- Improve digital safety and connectivity throughout Perth and Kinross, enhancing online opportunities for women.
- Provide improved working conditions and pay for paid carers.
- Rejuvenate Perth City Centre through increased recreational and business opportunities, enabling tourism growth and the retaining of young people.
- Provide long-term, flexible funding structures for third sector organisations.
- Increase the number of community spaces available for women across Perth and Kinross.

Thank You!

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the women who joined us in Perth to provide their lived experience, our work would be impossible without the continued support of women.



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