



Programme for Government

WOMEN'S VOICES
REPRESENTED

THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CONVENTION
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Introduction

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded by the Scottish Government to consult with as wide a range of women as possible throughout Scotland. This allows for the gathering of real lived experiences which are then fed into policy making channels in a way that ensures equality is critical to the political and legislative agenda.

The SWC consults with all women across the country in order to gain as many perspectives as possible. This is emphasised by a strong commitment to ensure evidence gathering from groups who may feel their voices are often not integral to policy making. The SWC stresses its remit to truly represent the broad range of women's experiences of inequality at all social and cultural levels. As the source of this knowledge is women's real lived experiences, it allows for perspectives often missed in other forms of research, particularly for under-represented women.

Over the past year, the SWC has made a number of significant contributions and recommendations to Governmental and Parliamentary Calls for Evidence. In the Scottish Government's most recent Programme for Government 2020-21, the First Minister made a number of significant policy announcements that align with many of these recommendations. We have provided an overview of some of the key themes in which the SWC has fed into policy making by using women's voices. Ensuring that it is these lived experiences that can affect how policy makes a difference to women's lives and takes forth equality is vital to our country.

We welcome the opportunity to ensure women at all levels across Scotland are able to take part in the consultation process and will continue to do all we can to bring forth these important voices and contribute to equality.



Foreword: Agnes Tolmie, SWC Chair



Here at the Scottish Women's Convention (SWC), we have been working throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to gather women's voices and ensure they are still key at all times in decision making processes.

As an organisation, we pride ourselves on gaining women's experiences directly, particularly those who are so often missed or overlooked. These are the ones that stand to lose the most and who policymakers and politicians desperately need to understand. We know that inequality is one of the real issues that causes women to suffer. We've worked hard to make sure women from under-represented groups and those who may be digitally excluded can still have their voices heard during this time.

The unpredictability of what is still to come as we emerge from the pandemic is extremely concerning for women. It has shown just how precarious our social safety nets are. There are a number of key issues that will incur as a result of the current situation. Women as a whole have been disproportionately impacted by the crisis and are likely to see further increases in poverty and other inequalities. One particular factor which has come up is just how widespread these problems truly are. Covid-19 has not brought forth some new form of inequality, but it has sharply illustrated what were already pressing issues for women across the country.

As a society, we have to recognise the inequality women face in all aspects of life, particularly where this is exacerbated by additional discrimination. This means working to increase representation at all decision making levels that truly reflects the make up of women in Scotland and listening to where women with real lived experience know targeted interventions are most needed.

We thank all the women who have taken part in the wide range of evidence gathering methods we've used, particularly where this may have been difficult over the past few months. The SWC will continue to do all we can to put forth women's voices in the decision making process and ensure they are included as a priority.

Housing & Homelessness

Housing for women in Scotland represents safety and equality for themselves and their families. It is a key indicator of inequality and can place barriers to employment, health and educational access. Ensuring safe accommodation for women that accounts for their unique personal experiences is of the utmost priority.

What women told the SWC:

- ◇ Ensure new housing developments have planning in place for public transport links, including proximity to key locations for employment, job centres and access to supermarkets.
- ◇ Implement effective strategies that make use of existing housing stock and empty homes and buildings.
- ◇ Ensure national housing policies contain support and work for women at a local level, including an in-depth knowledge of the area and other relevant information.
- ◇ Easier and more accessible processes for tenants to appeal rent rises within the private rented sector as well as support to navigate the system.
- ◇ Ensure adequate allocation of resources to help rectify any imbalances within particular local authority areas which may be under pressure from increased demand.
- ◇ Set out minimum standards and guidance for tenants in both the private and socially rented sector, including access to the Housing Tribunal and advocacy organisations.
- ◇ Ensure ongoing promotion of funding sources for women to access help for housing costs, including the Scottish Welfare Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments.
- ◇ Further measures to help with rent for those on the lowest incomes, including help with significant arrears due to Universal Credit delays.
- ◇ Work to tackle unsustainable and low-quality housing which women and their families currently occupy.



Programme for Government:

- ◇ Work with partners across the housing sector to deliver the remainder of the 50, 000 affordable homes target as quickly as it is safe to do so given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ◇ Set out a 20 year plan to deliver energy efficient, zero carbon housing with access to outdoor space, transport links, digital connectivity, and community services.
- ◇ Commit £300 million of interim funding for 2021- 22, ensuring that affordable homes continue to be delivered beyond the current parliamentary term.
- ◇ Improve the quality of all Scottish Government funded homes.
- ◇ Establish a new £10 million Tenant Hardship Loan Fund later in 2020 to provide interest free loans to support those struggling to meet their rent costs due to financial difficulty associated with the pandemic.
- ◇ Increase the Discretionary Housing Payments funding by a further £3 million, bringing total funding for this to over £80 million.
- ◇ Extend the emergency legislation put in place to protect private and social tenants from eviction during the pandemic up to six months, subject to approval from the Scottish Parliament.



Homelessness

What women told the SWC:

- ◇ Expansion of women focused services with an emphasis on housing support as well as a continuous analysis of Housing First outcomes.
- ◇ Continue to provide access to advocacy organisations and recognise the health inequalities faced by homeless women with complex needs, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ◇ Remove the need for local connection to a certain local authority area.
- ◇ Provide safe environments for periods of self-isolation, particularly for homeless women who may be in the most vulnerable health categories during the current pandemic.

Programme for Government:

- ◇ Continue to implement the homelessness prevention pathways so that people have positive housing pathways that support them to keep a settled home and achieve positive outcomes in their lives.
- ◇ Take forward plans to remove the requirement for people facing homelessness to have a connection with the local area before they can receive an offer of settled accommodation.
- ◇ Fund a six-month pilot project to facilitate settled accommodation in the private rented sector for individuals who are currently living in hotels in Edinburgh, having previously been rough sleeping or using the care shelter.
- ◇ Continue to work with local authorities in areas where rough sleeping is most prevalent to ensure people currently accommodated in hotel rooms receive person centred support, coupled with a strong accommodation offer to prevent a return to rough sleeping.



Health & Wellbeing

Women tend to be most at risk from restricted access to healthcare and other vital services. Whilst current measures to protect our healthcare system and frontline workers is viewed as wholly positive, this has also led to a heightened rise in health inequalities. Ensuring high standard physical and mental health treatment which recognises the personalised experiences of women is key for positive health outcomes.

What women told the SWC:

- ◇ Joined up approaches to healthcare, including recognition of transport access and income inequality, to prevent unequal distribution of services.
- ◇ Encourage uptake and recruitment of Community Link Workers, particularly with a view to reducing health inequalities.
- ◇ Increase the use of community hubs in less populated areas where women can go to access information and support around health.
- ◇ Wider discussions of the health effects of Violence against Women and Girls.
- ◇ Improve access to language and interpreters for women where English is not a first language, including training to notice potential added vulnerabilities of such individuals.
- ◇ Expand the use of technology for ease of access to health and social care services, including awareness of those not technologically literate or who lack access.
- ◇ A better understanding of women's bodies, recognising the often debilitating pain that many face as a result of undiagnosed conditions and lack of treatment.
- ◇ Quality care within the community in order to effectively rehabilitate those with short-term illnesses.
- ◇ Ensure early discharges from hospital is not used prematurely where women cannot secure appropriate support and treatment.
- ◇ Work to increase awareness of women's reproductive health from menstruation to menopause.



Programme for Government:

- ◇ Continue to develop Women's Health Plans to underpin actions to tackle women's health inequalities by raising awareness around this and improving access to healthcare for women throughout life.
- ◇ Ensure women have access to specialist menopause services for advice and support on the diagnosis and management of menopause.
- ◇ Improve access for women to appropriate support, speedy diagnosis and best treatment for endometriosis.
- ◇ Increase information on menstrual health and management options.
- ◇ Greater access to abortion and contraception services.
- ◇ Ensure rapid and easily accessible postnatal contraception.
- ◇ Reduce inequalities in health outcomes for women's general health, including work on cardiac disease.
- ◇ Continue to work to deliver improved services for women who have suffered complications as a result of transvaginal mesh.
- ◇ Roll out of a new digital monitoring solution to support people who are dealing with a diagnosis of and longer term effects of Covid-19.
- ◇ Continue the recruitment of 250 community link workers by the end of the Parliament.



Mental Health

What women told the SWC:

- ◇ Further publicity around mental health issues and where to access support, including a focus on preventative and early intervention solutions for women.
- ◇ Accessible treatment for those with addiction that encompasses all issues, including mental health and adverse childhood experiences.
- ◇ Recognise the increased mental health implications in women, particularly where access to support networks has been limited due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ◇ Implement education around mental health and wellbeing for young women.
- ◇ Ensure targeted support for the unique impact of inequality on women's mental health, such as domestic abuse and other forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
- ◇ Awareness raising of support groups in and around local areas, including sign posting by health professionals to third sector organisations.
- ◇ Target strategies and responses to heightened forms of social isolation within communities.
- ◇ Commit to tackling understaffing in mental healthcare services in order to cope with demand and allow women to pick what is most comfortable for them.
- ◇ Raise awareness and target information surrounding post-natal depression for women.



Mental Health

Programme for Government:

- ◇ Progress the commitment to recruit 800 mental health workers to key settings, including GP practices.
- ◇ Continue, as part of discussions on the GP contract, to look at further ways to support the recruitment of mental health workers in the community.
- ◇ Engage with women's organisations in order to identify and take action to support women and girls' mental health on an individual and structural level.
- ◇ Work to support women and their families in the perinatal period through the Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Programme Board.
- ◇ Build on existing research into the causes of poorer mental health for teenage girls and take action to address the impact of social media and body image on young women.
- ◇ Act to address the mental health impact on those living with domestic violence, abuse, coercive control and toxic masculinity.



Employment

Women as a group stand to be the ones disproportionately hit by the economic fallout of the current situation. Many have voiced fears covering a range of areas relating to employment, including job and wage cuts, contract changes and the struggle to find sustainable work. Going forward, it is felt that we have to not only restart the Scottish economy, but refresh it in a way that ensures equality is at the forefront.

Employment

What women told the SWC:

- ◇ Commit to continue working with businesses and unions to further promote the real living wage across all sectors.
- ◇ Encourage wider trade union membership to assert collective bargaining and equality rights.
- ◇ Target nationalised campaigns to highlight sexual harassment and abuse towards female workers.
- ◇ Work with the private sector to implement the Fair Work Framework.
- ◇ Ensure that women with intersectional characteristics gain access to further support and resources for employment and education.
- ◇ Commit to additional funding for agencies to ensure legal help to individuals regarding equality, health and safety legislation and employment rights.
- ◇ Ensure return to work and retraining programmes take account of all age groups and digital skills abilities, particularly in sectors where women are under-represented.
- ◇ Ensure opportunities, education, and potential career paths for women, particularly BAEM, disabled women, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, are further promoted.
- ◇ Continue to increase awareness and targeted funding for the under-representation of women in specific sectors, including STEM and construction, with a particular focus on under-represented groups.



Employment

Programme for Government:

- ◇ A £60 million Youth Guarantee Scheme to ensure every young person aged between 16 and 24 is guaranteed an opportunity at university or college, an apprenticeship programme, employment including work experience, or participating in a formal volunteering programme.
- ◇ Invest up to £10 million in Developing the Youth Workforce Regional Groups to support more young people to access the labour market.
- ◇ Introduce a £25 million National Transition Training Fund to provide support to 10,000 people facing redundancy and unemployment. This includes for those affected by redundancy through the Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE) initiative.
- ◇ Actively work with employers to expand payment of the real Living Wage.
- ◇ Make an additional £2.35 million available for the Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF).
- ◇ Review the actions within the Fairer Scotland for Women: Gender Pay Gap Action Plan to ensure the actions are fit for purpose and will effectively support economic recovery through the pandemic and beyond.
- ◇ Publish a recruitment toolkit designed to support employers in recruiting more people from minority ethnic backgrounds as part of efforts to improve outcomes for minority ethnic people moving into, staying in and progressing in employment.
- ◇ Work with trade unions and employers to pioneer new ways of embedding fair work practices in all workplaces.



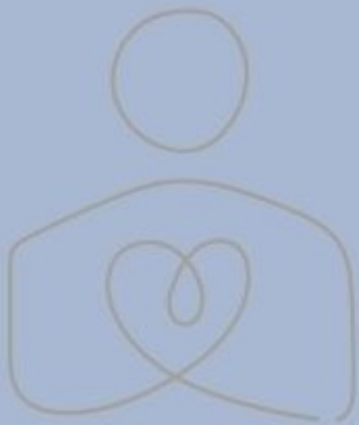
Social Security

Women make up the majority of lone parents, are on low wages and tend to rely heavily on social security. Cuts to such assistance leads to further increases in poverty and inequality for women. Given the scale of such issues, social security must aim to ensure women and their families do not face further hardship and acts in a way that promotes equality.

Social Security

What women told the SWC:

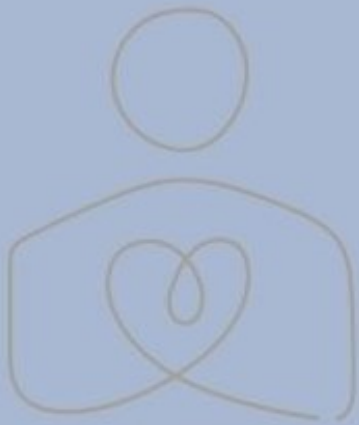
- ◇ Ensure all those in need of assistance are treated with dignity, respect and are made aware of their rights at all stages of the social security process.
- ◇ Additional supplementary payments to those most in need through Social Security Scotland, similar to the approach taken with the additional Carer's Allowance Supplement in June of this year.
- ◇ Ensure frameworks account for continuous data gathering at a national and local level in order to monitor the financial impact of the current pandemic and direct assistance to where it is lacking.
- ◇ Commit social security initiatives to account for the cost of living as well as inflationary and employment issues with appropriate safeguards in place for those at high risk of poverty.
- ◇ Increase funding for advocacy organisations to ensure women are aware of their rights around the social security appeals process and other financial issues.
- ◇ Use mitigation where possible to offset cuts and austerity by topping up benefits and lift the benefit cap.
- ◇ Place emphasis on the need for greater food security for many families living in poverty, including a commitment to universal strategies such as free school meals for all children to encourage maximum uptake.
- ◇ Ensure that delivery of assistance is implemented effectively at both a national and local level to account for factors within local areas, such as internet accessibility.
- ◇ Continue to prioritise roll out of further assistance for those most in need to make sure access is available as soon as possible.



Social Security

Programme for Government:

- ◇ Commit to doing more to promote benefit take up including:
 - making a benefits eligibility checker available online.
 - considering which benefits need specific attention and how partners and online content can help strengthen take up.
- ◇ Explore with COSLA how to embed Scotland's Social Security principles and human rights based approaches within the local authority level benefits and payments system.
- ◇ Make £2.4 million ring fenced funding available for debt advice, focusing on innovative and inventive approaches.
- ◇ Work with Citizens Advice to support smaller scale, local projects run by its members across Scotland.
- ◇ Continue to fund national initiatives like grocery box parcels for people shielding.
- ◇ Provide flexible investment for local authorities and third sector organisations to put in place coordinated responses to food insecurity at a local level.



Social Care

Social care in Scotland has been undervalued for far too long. The impact of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown has shone a light on the lack of investment and other challenges in the sector. Of the 200, 000 people who work in social care, women make up 85% of this number. These women have been at the frontline throughout the pandemic, continuing to do their jobs under immense pressure and risk.

What women told the SWC:

- ◇ The need to place greater value financially and as a society on the social care sector. This includes recognising the labour that is undertaken by workers, the majority of whom are women, within this profession.
- ◇ A wide scale review into practices of both the private and public social care sector during the Covid-19 pandemic, including the risk of exposure to infection for workers and service users.
- ◇ Increase the provision of high-quality training for those working within the sector.
- ◇ Greater protection of social care worker's rights and sick pay through the Fair Work Framework.
- ◇ End the current appointment system of giving workers just 15 minutes each day per service user.
- ◇ Increase guidance around Self Directed Support, including providing training for those employed through this form of assistance.
- ◇ Engage with the wider social care workforce, including BAEM workers, to understand their experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic in social care.
- ◇ Commit to analysing the ways in which ethnic minority communities access social care services and the barriers that may be in place to this.
- ◇ Lay out guidance for those accessing adult social care to ensure they and their loved ones are aware of their rights and are included at all stages of the process.



Programme for Government:

- ◇ Immediately establish a comprehensive and fundamental independent review of adult social care, which will report by January 2021 and will consider:
 - Changes required to achieve the highest attainable standard of support for the independence and wellbeing of people who use adult social care support.
 - Improvements to adult social care in Scotland. This will focus on the outcomes achieved by and with people who use services, their carers and families, and the experience of people who work in adult social care.
 - Using the powers that are available to the Scottish Parliament to set out how adult social care can be reformed to deliver a national approach to care and support services.
- ◇ Set standards for how adult social care assessments and allocation of resources are carried out. This will ensure people accessing support are fully involved in decision making and experience greater consistency and transparency
- ◇ Complete a review of care services definitions, this will enable social care support services and workers to be more flexible and responsive to people's needs and to work more autonomously,
- ◇ Work with Integration Authorities and Local Authorities to ensure planning and purchasing of social care support is focused on flexible and person centred support



Other Policy

Commitments

Unpaid Care

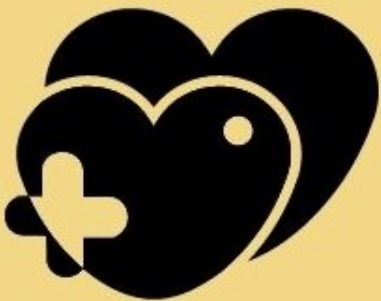
Women make up the vast number of unpaid carers within our society. This has been exacerbated by the current crisis with many having to undertake a range of additional responsibilities, including home schooling and caring for multiple persons whilst continuing to work.

What women told the SWC:

- ◇ Account for the health and wellbeing impact of Covid-19 on carers.
- ◇ Provide a national dialogue about caring responsibilities and the disproportionate impact on women.
- ◇ Additional guidance about entitlements, including respite services for carers.
- ◇ Work nationally to recognise the unequal impact on women of unpaid care and the obstacles they face.
- ◇ Provide extra funding for carers to access information on their rights.

Programme for Government:

- ◇ Work with carer services to increase their capacity and ensure sharing of best practice.
- ◇ An additional £11.6 million for ongoing implementation of the Carers (Scotland) Act.
- ◇ Continue to work to build on public awareness to encourage those who are caring to take up the support that is available to them.
- ◇ Continue to deliver the £3 million voluntary sector Short Breaks fund, offering time off and away for carers.
- ◇ Work with carer representative bodies to understand, and respond to, the mental health impacts of Covid-19 and lockdown on carers, recognising the disproportionate burden experienced by female carers.



Connectivity

The increased reliance on digital platforms over the past few months has left those without access at a loss. This has seen digital exclusion for women and children where technology is unaffordable or in areas where connectivity is low.

What women told the SWC:

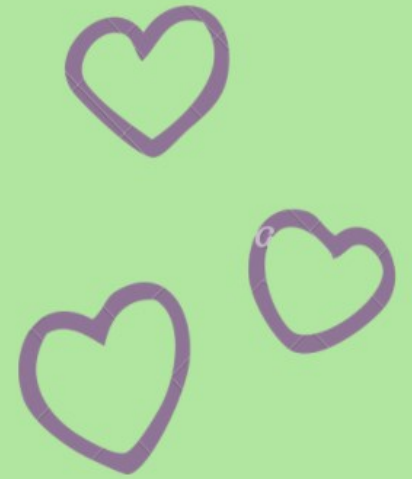
- ◇ Digital skills training programmes for women to ensure they have sufficient skills.
- ◇ Targeted funding for children facing barriers due to technological inaccessibility.
- ◇ Continue to invest to ensure broadband targets are achieved on time, including refreshed and updated timescales and guidance as needed.
- ◇ Ensure adequate funding for affordable broadband, recognising the distinct challenges in both rural and urban areas.

Programme for Government:

- ◇ A drive to end digital exclusion in Scotland through the Connecting Scotland programme.
- ◇ Leverage the National Transition Training Fund wherever possible to encourage more people to take advantage of the digital skills training opportunities that we already have in Scotland.
- ◇ Investing £30 million as part of a digital boost through provision of laptops for disadvantaged children and young people. This will include funding to enable a rollout of digital devices to school pupils to enable them to study online, with an initial provision of approximately 25,000 Chromebooks.
- ◇ Commit an additional £23m this year to help more digitally excluded people get online – providing both devices and internet connections. This will bring the total number of people supported to 50,000 by the end of 2020.



*Thank
you!*



Thank you to all the women who took part in our discussions. As an organisation, the SWC will continue to ensure women's voices are key in the policy making process.

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