

Scottish Women's Convention
response to the Scottish
Parliament's Call for Views on:

Scotland's Public Sector Reform:
Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2027-2028



29th July 2026

Premise

Public services shape every aspect of people's lives, from their access to healthcare, education and transport through to the less visible functions that underpin our daily lives like food safety, the quality of our drinking water and registration services. All of these services are expected to be effective, accessible and to run like clockwork and yet they continue to be hampered by pressure from the lasting impacts of Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, global instability, increasing need and financial constraints. Amongst all of this, significant inequalities persist across Scotland, with many women disproportionately affected by poverty, caring responsibilities and barriers to accessing the support that they need.

Despite a drive towards higher investment in public services, public satisfaction in their usefulness has largely declined, with many women telling us that services can be difficult to navigate, broken and overstretched. Frontline staff describe systems that limit their ability to respond flexibly to people's needs, while continued duplication and unnecessary complexity can reduce effectiveness.

More than a decade after the Christie Commission highlighted the need to shift resources towards prevention, too much public spending still remains focused on responding to crises rather than in preventing them.

Our consultation response provides us with an opportunity to highlight how we feel public service reform can better meet women's needs by addressing structural inequalities, improving access and prioritising prevention and early intervention.



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.

**“The whole system is lacking...it’s a bureaucratic nightmare.”
*The Realities of Scottish Social Care for Women, January 2026*¹**

Question1. The Scottish Government aims to deliver on average £0.5 billion in savings through efficiencies per year for the next three years (2026-27 to 2028-29):

a) To what extent are these savings achievable and how will they shape public service delivery?

Savings are certainly achievable if they come from improving how services work rather than merely reducing spending in those areas. We would move for the implementation of co-ordinated working practices across organisations, which in some ways can help reduce duplication, improvements to digital systems and investment in preventative actions as we feel that these would all be measures likely to deliver better value over time.²

However, the Scottish Women’s Convention (SWC) is concerned that any drive towards making savings in targeted areas could result in costs simply being moved elsewhere. Savings can only be viewed as being sustainable long term if they do not make access to services more problematic or lead to further increases in inequality.

Taking social care as an example, reducing budgets in this area may have the potential to increase the amount of unpaid care provided by women and additionally, further increase pressures on vital NHS services.

We know from our work with women across Scotland that they are more likely to use public services, undertake unpaid care and work in the public sector, accounting for 73% of unpaid carers in Scotland and 80% of working age carers³. As well as this, almost half of the women who took part in our recent survey on social care had to give up work or education, so this clearly demonstrates that there is already a problem there.⁴

“The government is relying on us to do the caring because then it isn’t coming out of their pockets.”⁵

Bearing this in mind then, the SWC feels that any drive towards efficiencies may well have a disproportionate impact on women and so, prior to roll out, we would call for more equality impact assessments to be carried out.

¹ Scottish Women’s Convention *The Realities of Scottish Social Care for Women*
<https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/social-care-report-final.pdf>

² Scottish Government *Public Service Reform Strategy (2025)*.
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-public-service-reform-strategy-delivering-scotland/>

³ Scottish Government *Carers Census Scotland 2023-2024* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/carers-census-scotland-2023-24/>

⁴ Scottish Women’s Convention *Realities of Social Care Survey*
<https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/realities-of-social-care-survey-3.pdf>

⁵ Scottish Women’s Convention *The Realities of Scottish Social Care for Women*
<https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/social-care-report-final.pdf>

b) What progress is being made towards achieving these efficiencies?

The SWC believes that there has been some progress made through the publication of the Public Service Reform Strategy, Fiscal Sustainability Delivery Plan and Spending Review.⁶

However, it is not always clear where savings have been delivered, whether these will be permanent or limited, or even whether any costs have simply been transferred elsewhere within other areas of public sector delivery.

“Sometimes it takes a while for systems to kick in, so in the meantime, who is left to do the work.”⁷

The SWC welcomes the fact that Audit Scotland have already highlighted the need for greater transparency regarding the delivery of public service reform and fiscal sustainability and we support any moves to ensure clearer reporting strategies are implemented.⁸

c) What are the barriers to achieving greater efficiency and how can these be addressed?

The SWC believes that there are several key barriers which include continued short term budget cycles, workforce pressures, insufficient investment in preventative measures, inconsistent funding arrangements, limited data sharing across services and organisations and limited consideration of equality impacts.

Challenging these barriers could be achieved through multi-year funding settlements, better workforce planning and greater investment in preventative services.⁹

The SWC is particularly concerned that preventative services can become vulnerable during periods of financial pressure despite their long-term social and economic benefits. Investment in prevention should be protected wherever possible.

Question 2. How should the Scottish Government best present the extent of any realised efficiencies in the annual budget publication, including providing clarity on whether these are expected to be recurring savings?

The SWC calls for transparency at all times. We believe that the Scottish Government should clearly set out how much money has been saved; whether savings will be a one off or permanent; how these savings were achieved; whether any other services have been affected; potential impacts on workforce and whether costs have been transferred elsewhere

⁶ Scottish Government *Fiscal Sustainability Delivery Plan* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-governments-fiscal-sustainability-delivery-plan/>

⁷ Scottish Women's Convention *Realities of Social Care Survey*

<https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/realities-of-social-care-survey-3.pdf>

⁸ Audit Scotland *Fiscal Sustainability and Reform in Scotland* <https://audit.scot/publications/fiscal-sustainability-and-reform-in-scotland>

⁹ Scottish Government *Public Service Reform Strategy (2025)*.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-public-service-reform-strategy-delivering-scotland/>

This information should be published each year to allow Parliament to properly scrutinise its progress. Savings should not be described as efficiencies where they simply represent delayed spending or reductions in service provision.¹⁰

Question 3. The Fiscal Sustainability Delivery Plan aims to achieve an average reduction of the public sector workforce of 0.5% per year over five years.

a) To what extent is reducing the public sector workforce by 0.5% each year achievable and how will it shape public service delivery?

As women make up the majority of workers in many of Scotland's public services including in health, education, social care and local government, any workforce reductions would therefore have the potential to disproportionately affect women both as employees and as service users.¹¹

The impact on workloads, staff wellbeing and service quality should be monitored carefully. Workforce reductions should not result in increased workloads that contribute to poorer outcomes for staff or service users.

b) What progress is being made towards achieving this target?

There is currently very limited publicly accessible information on how workforce reductions are being achieved across different parts of the public sector.¹²

The SWC would welcome greater transparency in specific areas including where workforce reductions are already being made, the impact this is having on staff wellbeing, how it is affecting service delivery, the potential impacts on waiting times and workloads and any impact they are having on equality outcomes.

Question 4. What actions can the Scottish Government take to ensure these workforce reductions are delivered in a managed way which best supports effective government and public service delivery?

The SWC in no way endorses any further reduction in public services and their delivery and so has no comment on this.

Question 5. The PSR strategy states that it will protect frontline services. To what extent is there sufficient clarity about how frontline roles are defined and how efficiencies in back-office functions can be delivered in a way that minimises impact on the delivery of public services?

¹⁰ Audit Scotland *Fiscal Sustainability and Reform in Scotland* <https://audit.scot/publications/fiscal-sustainability-and-reform-in-scotland>

¹¹ Engender *Engender Response to the Scottish Labour Policy Reform Consultation* <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-Response-to-the-Scottish-Labour-Policy-Forum---Jan-2025.pdf>

¹² Scottish Parliament *Finance and Public Administration Committee, Budget Scrutiny 2025-26 Papers*. <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/committees/current-and-previous-committees/Session-6/session-6-finance-and-public-administration-committee/business-items/budget-scrutiny-2025-2026>

The SWC believes that clarity is lacking when considering what constitutes a frontline role.

Many roles, other than frontline staff, are equally essential to the delivery of public services. Administrative staff, digital teams, finance teams and support workers also contribute significantly to service delivery.

The Scottish Women's Convention is concerned that basic distinctions between frontline and supplementary staff risks overlooking all those involved in delivering services across the third sector.¹³

Question 6. Beyond the financial benefits that the Public Sector Reform (PSR) Strategy aims to achieve, what are the key outcomes that reform should be aiming for?

The SWC believes that public service reform should aim to deliver better outcomes for service users, reduce inequalities, improve access to services, improve staff wellbeing, allow for better connectedness across organisations, improve transparency and accountability and deliver sustainable value when using public funds.

Success should not be measured solely by the amount of money saved. We would particularly welcome greater emphasis on reducing poverty and inequality and improving women's economic equality through public service reform.

“They will save so much money if we ever get to the point of listening to women.”¹⁴

Question 7. The PSR Strategy includes 18 different workstreams which aim to remove barriers to reform.

One workstream focuses on “simplification”, recognising that “complexity of processes, structures and reporting requirements is a key barrier to effective and efficient service delivery”.

“Prevention” is one of three pillars providing structure to the Strategy.

a) What should the Scottish Government's priorities be under the simplification workstream and what level of savings can be achieved?

The SWC has no comment to make on this.

b) What progress has been made to date with preventative budgeting?

There has been increased recognition of the importance of prevention, but progress remains slower than many organisations had hoped.¹⁵

¹³ Scottish Government *Public Service Reform Strategy (2025)*.
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-public-service-reform-strategy-delivering-scotland/>

¹⁴ Scottish Women's Convention *The Impact of Poverty on Women*
<https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/poverty-conference-final-report.pdf>

¹⁵ Scottish Government *Public Service Reform Strategy (2025)*.
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-public-service-reform-strategy-delivering-scotland/>

Preventative spending continues to face challenges during periods of financial pressure because its benefits are often realised over several years rather than being immediate.

The SWC, through its work with women, has consistently argued that investment in early intervention services can reduce demand for more costly crisis services in the longer term.

c) How should the forthcoming Budget support greater progress towards preventative budgeting across the devolved public sector? Please set out any barriers and how these can be addressed.

The SWC has no comment to make on this.

d) What changes to the Scottish Government's approach to budget-setting are needed?

The SWC believes that the Scottish Government should:

- strengthen multi-year planning and budgeting
- improve transparency around spending decisions
- better align spending with long-term outcomes
- strengthen equality and human rights budgeting
- improve parliamentary scrutiny of potential reform programmes
- support preventative approaches across all portfolios.

The SWC would welcome the greater use of gender budgeting methodologies when considering public service reform proposals to help ensure that spending decisions do not unintentionally widen existing inequalities.¹⁶

Question 8. The Scottish Government included an upfront Invest to Save Fund of around £30 million in the 2025-26 and 2026-27 Scottish Budgets for reform projects that will deliver ongoing savings and support the delivery of the PSR strategy.

a) To what extent is the Invest to Save Fund delivering projects that achieve ongoing savings?

It is too early to fully assess the Fund's long-term impact and so the SWC has no comment on this.

b) How are successful outcomes from this Fund being shared more widely across the public sector?

As a model of good practice, the SWC believes that successful projects should be supported by published evaluations, opportunities for shared learning across organisations, greater transparency when considering outcomes and clear and robust reporting mechanisms.

¹⁶ Scottish Government *Gender Policy Coherence: Annual Statement 2025*
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/annual-statement-gender-policy-coherence-2025/pages/12/>

Any learning outcomes, from both successful and unsuccessful projects, is essential if reform programmes are to deliver lasting improvements across Scotland's public services. The SWC believes that public service reform should be understood as a long-term process rather than a short-term savings exercise. Reforms will only ever be successful if they improve outcomes, reduce inequalities and maintain accessible, high-quality public services while delivering sustainable value for the public purse.

Conclusion

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on Scotland's Public Sector Reform Strategy: Delivering for Scotland. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to this topic and its effects on women's equality.

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