

2026

ROADSHOW

Argyll and Bute

June 2026



The Scottish Women's Convention

Introduction

In June 2026, the Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) hosted a series of roundtable events across the Isle of Bute and Dunoon, speaking directly with local women about their experiences and the issues affecting their everyday lives.

Across both areas, women spoke warmly about the communities they lived in. They valued the natural environment, close relationships with neighbours and friends, and the support provided by local organisations. Many described communities where people looked out for one another and where that sense of connection could make a real difference.

At the same time, there was a clear tension between valuing these communities and feeling frustrated by the difficulties of accessing essential services and opportunities that might be taken for granted elsewhere. Women felt that the additional pressures of living in rural and island communities were not always recognised when services were being planned or delivered.

It was clear to us that the women we spoke to were not asking for special treatment because of where they lived. All they wanted was to be able to continue living in the communities they valued without being consistently disadvantaged by their geographical location.

Their experiences highlight an important distinction for policymakers and service providers: it is not simply whether a service exists or not, but whether it is genuinely accessible to everyone who needs it.

“Women's voices are often lost in these places because people don't tend to come here as often as they should.”

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

General healthcare

Women on Bute reported mixed experiences when discussing access to general healthcare.

Some participants described fairly positive experiences of local health professionals and access to female doctors:

"My experience has been that I can see a woman doctor with no trouble."

whilst other experiences were markedly different. One woman, while discussing a serious condition she felt had not been recognised early enough, described being:

"fobbed off by men."

These accounts demonstrate significant differences in women's experiences even within the same local healthcare system. There was greater agreement around the need for healthcare focussing specifically on women, particularly in relation to such conditions as menopause, perimenopause, menstrual health and contraception.

"None of the doctors' wives are of an age that have gone through the menopause...they'll appreciate it when their own wife starts going through it."

The women spoke positively about a former well woman clinic on the island which had since been taken away due to funding and resource issues.

"I remember a long, long time ago we had a clinic... it was very successful...it was very well attended... for whatever reason that kind of came to a close."

"It would be nice to have something that was more specific to [our] needs."

Women accepted that some specialist services would inevitably be provided away from the island, and there were some examples of excellent specialist care. However, the difficulties seemed to arise when women returned home and discovered that their follow-up health care could not be provided locally.

"Some of the healthcare options are there, but they're just kind of one step away from where they should be. I just don't know how accessible they are."

"So basically, your aftercare was down to you."

"...no real joined up writing in many aspects of things"

"If there isn't a pathway and it's not been financed, it doesn't exist."

We believe that this illustrates a wider problem when looking at continuity of care. A woman may well receive excellent care from one part of the health service but follow on treatments can stall, or be delayed, because there are no dedicated services in place to meet their needs.

Women in Dunoon raised many of the same areas of concern over women's health, including menopause and perimenopause, contraception, gynaecology, maternity care, female specific cancers and sexual health. However, their criticism often veered towards how services are commissioned and organised:

"So, I think the fundamental principle is the health commissioning isn't working."

"They're sending it out second class, and it's taking 15 days to get here, by that time you've missed your appointment"

Women questioned why some routine services often required extensive travel when they felt that greater use could be made of local facilities, particularly the local hospital.

They went on to describe repeated GP visits, having to consistently push for referrals and exploratory tests which led to many of their health concerns sometimes reaching a much more critical stage before receiving the treatment they needed.

The discussion around menopause was especially powerful. The women spoke about conditions or the treatment they required by themselves.

“[There’s] no sexual health clinic, there’s no contraception, there’s no menopause advice. There’s no implants taken in and out.”

“...she basically staged a sit in and said ‘I’m not leaving until this thing’s out of me, because it’s been in for four years now and it’s only supposed to be in for two’.”

A particular concern was raised around younger women, not only in relation to clinical treatment but in their inability to access reliable information around sexual health, contraception, hormones and their changing bodies.

“Where do our young girls go?”

Similar to Bute, women in Dunoon did not describe all healthcare as being poor. One woman who had undergone significant cancer-related treatments felt that:

“Being in the hospital was brilliant...my treatment, it was great, it was fantastic.”

However, she did discuss some difficulties with her journey through referrals, investigations and other processes before receiving her treatment. This clearly demonstrates an important distinction between the quality of secondary care treatment and that of the initial healthcare pathways.

Mental Health and Social Care

The women we spoke to on Bute recognised that there were often great examples of mental health and community support but expressed concerns that this support only became easier to access once problems had already escalated:

"I think we maybe need more input and prevention rather than at crisis point."

This preference for earlier intervention was repeated across several areas of our discussion.

Bute’s close community was considered an important source of informal support. The women described people often noticing changes in others and checking in on them on an almost daily basis. Issues around social care generated significant concern, particularly around how families identified and coordinated available support.

“...there is not the system in place that allows elegant solutions to complex scenarios.”

"There's no signposting, there's no model"

“[they’re] trying to tackle this system from a knowledge base of nothing.”

"You almost need like a 10-point plan. Have you done this? Do this, check this"

The women also raised difficulties when a person could no longer be supported on Bute and then had to move elsewhere for care, leaving relatives having to depend on off-island travel.

On Dunoon, waiting times for mental health services were a major concern. One mother said:

“Five years I waited for my son to get mental health support, and when they turned up, I actually thought it was for me because it had been that long.”

Other waits of two and a half years were also discussed. By the time help arrived, women felt families had often spent years carrying the pressure themselves.

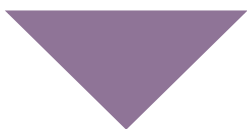
The women we spoke to were also conscious of the repeated strain on the care workforce. There were difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff which led to increased caseloads. Those caseloads then contributed to burnout and led to increased pressure on those staff who remained.

The voluntary sector was consistently praised for stepping into the gaps in provision with participants worrying about how sustainable that was long term:

“We’re all burnt out because it’s the same people that are volunteering all of the time.”

It was agreed that community organisations were amongst Bute and Dunoon’s greatest strengths, but strong communities cannot simply be expected to absorb unmet statutory targets indefinitely.

Both areas identified a greater need for earlier intervention before problems reached crisis point. While women on Bute placed a particular emphasis on navigating social care, coordination and signposting, alternatively participants in Dunoon focused more on mental health waiting times, workforce pressures and an over reliance on the voluntary sector.



Education

Education produced some of the most mixed views across all of our discussions, with women in both Bute and Dunoon describing positive developments alongside significant concerns. Experiences differed within each area, particularly in relation to educational opportunities, attainment, poverty, additional support needs and the options available to young people beyond their school years.

On Bute, some women were highly enthusiastic about the opportunities available to young people:

“I think they’ve got a lot of really good opportunities.”

Participants spoke positively about flexible subject choices, school trips, drama courses and recent opportunities connected with film-making. These experiences highlighted the range of activities and pathways that were being made available to individual pupils.

In stark contrast, other women were much more concerned about the wider educational picture:

“It’s sort of been known for a long time here. that the school’s been going down, unfortunately.”

Issues around educational attainment, particularly literacy and numeracy, were discussed alongside concerns about staffing.

We acknowledge that these contrasting accounts are not necessarily incompatible. A school can offer individual pupils exciting opportunities whilst also facing wider pressures around staffing and educational outcomes for others.

Poverty complicated these apparent inequalities even further. One woman stated:

“The poverty on this island is huge.”

Some of the participants pointed out that opportunities which may appear widely accessible are not always available to all young people. For example, online learning is dependent upon having access to a suitable device, an appropriate space to study in and sufficient support at home. That is often not something which all young people have access to.

“...you may well be all right saying, yes, children can learn online, but sometimes at home they won't even have a computer.”

For young people, looking beyond school, geography quickly became an important part of the discussion. Further education, university and specialist training generally required travelling away from Bute or relocating altogether.

This was closely connected to concerns about employment and whether young people who wanted to remain on the island could realistically build a future there:

“On the island we are quite limited to job opportunities.”

The discussion therefore linked educational progression not only with access to further study but also touched on the availability of longer-term employment opportunities on the island.

Women in Dunoon also described a mixed educational picture. Some spoke positively about growth within local primary schools, describing them as **“...actually booming.”** whilst others had an altogether different picture when it came to young people's prospects.

“I know of 10 to 12 young ladies who have been asked to leave school without taking exams.”

“And you know, when you go through 11 years of compulsory education, and they come out and they've got nothing. I mean, literally...what is the point of sending them?”

In particular, parents of children with autism, ADHD and other additional support needs described extremely difficult experiences.

The women spoke about difficulties securing meetings and appropriate support, delays in assessment, bullying, pressure on staff and staffing shortages. They also questioned whether mainstream education was always able to meet the needs of their children.

“...when I tried to send him back to school, that was just my son, I mean, he literally had a meltdown, said, I can't take it, Mum.”

“They could be brilliant at that one thing. rubbish at everything else. And if they're not getting the one thing that they need... they're disengaged.”

For some families, the difficulties experienced within school were significant enough that the only option available to them was to move the children into home schooling, with some women feeling that this had ultimately worked out better for their children and families.

“...he stood up in front of seven or eight people... and they basically couldn't deny how much he had improved over that year.”



Employment and Childcare

Women on Bute described a job market where opportunities could often feel limited, both in terms of the number of jobs available and the quality of those jobs.

When asked whether there were enough jobs locally, one woman responded vehemently:

“No, no, no!”

The participants spoke about low pay, limited training opportunities and little chance of job progression. There was also a sense that some workers often encountered difficulties in the workplace.

“They're not valued...only paying national minimum and working them like dogs.”

“They don't treat them well; they don't even train them.”

Concerns were also raised about opportunities for young people, particularly the decline in apprenticeships:

“A lot of the funding for modern apprenticeships has been lost as well.”

Young people were seen as facing strong competition for secure jobs and training opportunities. There were different views about whether these problems affected women more than men, with some of the women viewing them more as just a wider lack of good quality employment on the island.

Childcare was also an integral part of the discussion on women's employment. Its cost were summed up simply as:

“[being] far too expensive.”

Women described how childcare costs could make it difficult to justify working longer hours, particularly for those on lower incomes or single mothers. Reducing hours or leaving work could then have longer-term consequences for women's careers, earnings and pensions.

Women in Dunoon also spoke about limited employment opportunities, although the discussion focused more on the difficulty of progressing into better paid work. As one woman explained:

“The pathways into higher paying jobs are very limited because there are fewer employers to offer a way in.”

Some women also felt that clearer routes into apprenticeships and trades were often only available to young men:

“The jobs for the boys.”

Participants spoke about the importance of local and family connections when looking for work, particularly in an area where there are relatively few employers. At the same time, women running their own businesses were seen as an important and positive part of the local economy:

“There are a number of women on the high street, actually, who are running small businesses.”

However, it was clear that running a business did not remove the pressures women often faced outside of work. Many of the women described continuing to balance employment with childcare and other unpaid caring responsibilities.

In Dunoon, concerns about childcare were often more about whether suitable provision was available in practice. Women spoke about gaps in after school care, transport difficulties and the challenges of finding appropriate childcare for children with additional support needs. This meant that even where childcare did exist, it was not always suitable for every family.

Poverty and the Cost of Living

Women on Bute described the cost of living as a significant pressure on household finances. Food, fuel, heating, transport and other everyday essentials were all seen as becoming increasingly expensive.

“...food shopping’s crazy.”

Participants also felt that living on an island brought additional costs. Goods have to be transported to Bute, while residents may need to travel to the mainland for shopping, services or appointments. Some households tried to reduce their spending by shopping or buying fuel on the mainland, but this was only an option for those who had access to transport and could afford the cost of the journey. Online shopping often became necessary, even where women would have preferred to spend locally.

The women at our sessions spoke about poverty as a very real issue within the community, although one that was not always immediately visible. Food banks, Christmas hampers and school uniform initiatives were mentioned as examples of the support that some families relied upon.

“We absolutely have a need for [this].”

There was a strong view that support should be easy to access and offered in ways that protect people’s dignity. Women were particularly concerned about avoiding systems that could identify or stigmatise families experiencing financial hardship.

Women in Dunoon described similar pressures around the rising cost of everyday essentials, particularly food. One participant captured the scale of this increase by saying:

“...for a weekly shop, it’s £130 at least...so we’re spending the equivalent of our Christmas shop every week”

The women felt that local prices were often noticeably higher than those available elsewhere, which placed additional pressure on household budgets.

“There’s no competition, either.”

At the same time, they also recognised that cheaper shopping options could have dire consequences for the wider local economy. There was concern that large discount retailers may well make everyday goods more affordable for families but this could create difficulties for independent shops and small local businesses.

This meant that affordability was not discussed simply as a means of finding the cheapest option. For some women, there was a tension between juggling household costs and wanting to support local businesses by helping to build a thriving community.



Transport

Transport was an issue in both Bute and Dunoon, affecting access to healthcare, employment, education, shopping and family connections. Experiences were often shaped by frequency of services, costs, journey times, reliable connections and access to private transport.

On Bute, women's experiences of local transport were largely mixed with some participants being very positive about services believing them to be:

"Absolutely reliable."

"...the buses are great... but they don't cover the whole island."

However, availability in the evenings and at weekends was often extremely limited, particularly outside Rothesay. This could make return journeys difficult:

"I can go okay but then I can't come back."

Women without access to their own car faced particular challenges when trying to reach more rural parts of the island. One explained:

"I can no longer afford to run a car."

Walking routes and the natural environment were generally valued, although views on adequate cycling infrastructure and parking were more varied.

Dependency on ferries was a major concern with cost, reliability, journey times and onward connections all being affected by how accessible these services were in practice. Women felt that transport on the island should be treated as essential infrastructure.

In Dunoon, the women we spoke to discussed the safety and availability of public transport.

"We feel safe on public transport."

However, limited evening provision could often restrict travel:

"...good for the community as long as only you only want to stay out until half 9 at night."

The women we spoke to also indicated that journeys can be lengthy with one reporting:

"Two and a half hours, it took me yesterday to get to an appointment."

The women we spoke to also raised concerns about upfront travel costs, reimbursement and the difficulty of coordinating hospital appointments when public transport timetables did not align.

Transport affected access to services in both areas, but the challenges differed. On Bute, reliance on the ferry was a major issue, alongside limited evening and Sunday services and particular difficulties for women without access to their own transport. In Dunoon, concerns centred more on limited evening services, long journey times, poor timetable connections and difficulties with travel reimbursements.

Overall, the findings suggest that access depends not simply on the availability of transport, but on whether it is affordable, reliable and practical for the journeys women need to make.

Housing

Housing emerged as a significant concern in both Bute and Dunoon, with women emphasising that the issue was not simply the number of properties available, but whether homes were affordable, suitable and of an acceptable standard.

On Bute, women described a shortage of suitable and affordable housing. Concerns included older and poorly maintained properties, limited social housing, long waiting lists, a shortage of accessible homes and insufficient family sized accommodation. These pressures were particularly significant for young people seeking to live independently and for families hoping to remain on the island.

“I do know a lot of young people who have to live at home.”

The difficulty of finding somewhere to rent or even getting onto the property ladder was seen as a particular problem in rural and island communities. Women described a competitive housing market in which limited availability could affect a person’s ability to take up employment opportunities or remain in the area.

Short-term lets and second homes were also seen as contributing to pressure on the local housing market. One woman said:

“There were just flats being bought all over the place for Airbnb and that was hugely impacting...local communities”

At the same time, the women we spoke to recognised the additional costs and practical difficulties of building new housing on an island. There were also concerns about building on valuable green spaces.

“No builder can build here. because they're not going to make any profit.”

Housing was closely connected to wider concerns about depopulation. Women felt that younger people and families would find it difficult to remain on Bute if they could not access affordable homes.

Participants also raised concerns about poverty that may remain largely invisible due to households continuing to meet their rent payments despite experiencing significant financial pressure or poor living conditions.

“My worry at the moment is that we’ve got lots of families that are paying their rent but nobody actually sees how they’re living.”

This raised wider questions about prevention and whether families experiencing difficulties are being identified and supported before their housing situation reaches crisis point. Problems with landlords, poor housing conditions and homelessness were also part of the wider discussion around housing insecurity.

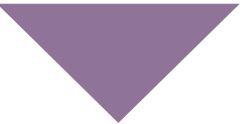
Women in Dunoon similarly described a shortage of genuinely affordable housing. Limited social housing, difficulties accessing the private rented sector and the high cost of getting onto the property ladder were seen as restricting housing choices.

As on Bute, short-term lets were identified as a source of pressure on the local property market:

“Airbnb’s are an issue because there’s so many of them.”

Participants also discussed the impact of second homes and the need to consider how new housing development fits in with the existing community. Whilst there were concerns over housing being unavailable or unaffordable for local residents, women also recognised that people moving into the area can often make a positive contribution. One participant summarised the need to manage these competing considerations:

“There has to be a balance, in order for the people who live here already, to get the housing that suits their needs.”



Emergency Services

On Bute, local emergency-service workers were generally valued. However, women raised concerns about the effects of centralisation, particularly where mainland-based systems and call handlers may not fully understand island geography, local circumstances or the practical realities involved in responding to incidents.

Access to the police was a particular source of frustration with ongoing upgrades meaning that the station remains closed. One participant stated:

“It doesn't feel safe to me not to be able to get through to the police...you have no physical police station.”

Participants were concerned not only about the immediate difficulty of reaching services, but also about the longer-term consequences of complicated or inaccessible reporting arrangements. They felt that, if people repeatedly find it difficult to contact the police, they may eventually stop reporting incidents. This could create a misleading impression that there is less demand for policing than actually exists.

“...you know, you want to report it, but who do you report to?”

More broadly, women emphasised the need for emergency services to reflect the realities of island life. As one participant summed up:

“Emergencies don't just happen between the of hours 9 to 5.”

These concerns reflect a wider theme within the discussions: services designed or managed centrally may not always fit the circumstances of island communities. Geography, transport and limited local provision can all make access more difficult, reinforcing the importance of services that are responsive to local conditions.



Technology and Digital Exclusion

On Bute, technology was discussed in three distinct ways: concerns about its impact on children and young people, digital exclusion from everyday services, and the wider environmental and economic effects of AI and data-centre development in Scotland.

Women raised concerns about social media, pornography, unrealistic images, harmful expectations about relationships, and the manipulation of photographs using AI. Rapid technological change also created uncertainty about new and emerging risks:

“Every week you hear something different that they're doing with AI.”

These concerns were linked to young people's understanding of relationships, sexuality and consent, with participants stressing the need for reliable information and opportunities to talk openly about these issues.

A separate concern was digital exclusion. Women felt that as more services presume that people have smartphones, internet access and digital skills, those without them risk being shut out of obtaining information and accessing essential services:

“if you've not got a smartphone, you're almost invisible or you're being isolated from a variety of things.”

Women therefore felt that essential services should continue to offer meaningful non-digital alternatives rather than assuming that everyone can access services online.

Women also raised distinct concerns about AI and data-centre development on the island, particularly its environmental impact and whether promised economic benefits would come to fruition. Participants referred to experiences they had heard about elsewhere:

“When you listen to the lived experience of people that have got it in America, who now don't have any water.”

The women questioned whether the wider consequences were being fully considered:

“It's touted as a good thing because we've got this site but they don't really know the complexities of it all.”

There was also scepticism about developers' claims of significant employment opportunities:

“And don't fob me off with... 120 new jobs.”

“It'll just end up as...2 programmers and a severe environmental impact.”



Community, Safety and Women's Voices

A strong sense of community emerged as one of the most positive aspects of life for women on Bute. Women spoke positively about neighbours, businesses, churches and community organisations looking out for people and providing informal support. This was reflected in the simple observation:

"I think it's a good community"

Most of the women also described Bute as a place where they generally felt safe and recognised the comparison of island life with more isolated places:

"...this is a lot safer than the middle of nowhere."

Even when discussing a serious local incident, this overall sense of safety remained:

"I mean, it would have been a shock anyway. It was horrendous, but I think on the whole, well, I feel very safe."

Alongside these positive experiences of community and safety, women raised concerns about alcohol, drugs, poverty and mental-health difficulties. The women we spoke to felt that Bute's reputation as a safe, attractive and close-knit community could sometimes obscure less visible social problems. One participant captured the tension between the island's positive image and these underlying issues

“...it says beautiful, idyllic place, gorgeous island and it's safer than Glasgow, but you know what? We've still got all these underlying issues going on.”

Her comment suggests that community strength and feelings of safety coexist with significant social problem and that there were concerns that these issues may be less visible because Bute is widely looked upon with nostalgia and fondness.

The women we spoke to on Bute highlighted the need to engage with younger women directly, particularly around confidential access to contraception, sexual and reproductive healthcare, mental-health support and help relating to abuse. In a close-knit community, concerns about being recognised or personal information becoming known may discourage women from seeking support.

“A lot of young women maybe don’t want to be seen going into the surgery because they’re thinking that’s my granny’s neighbour, she might tell her.”

Women also wanted better education for young people on healthy relationships, sexual violence and consent, including encouraging them **“to think about what consent actually means”**.

Informal, welcoming spaces were suggested as a discreet and accessible way to provide information and support on health, relationships, employment and other services.

Overall, participants valued Bute’s strong community networks but stressed that these do not remove challenges around poverty, mental health, substance use, violence against women and access to services. They emphasised maintaining local services, protecting confidential routes to support, involving younger women directly and ensuring women can meaningfully influence decisions affecting their lives.

Community was similarly identified as one of Dunoon’s strongest attributes. Women valued the range of local activity, businesses, community organisations and the surrounding natural environment. As one woman commented:

“There’s so much going on.”

These aspects of community life were seen as important sources of connection, participation and informal support for women.

At the same time, women expressed concern about the sustainability and availability of the physical spaces that allow community activity to flourish. The reduction of accessible community venues was viewed as particularly significant:

“...the community spaces are reducing for women all the time”

Community spaces were valued not simply as venues, but as part of the infrastructure that enables women to meet, engage in local life, build relationships and access informal support.

Women in Dunoon expressed differing views about their opportunities to influence local decisions. Some participants felt that local representatives were accessible and that there were opportunities to raise concerns directly whilst others felt that consultation did not necessarily translate into meaningful engagement and that decision-making remained overly centralised.

“There’s no connectivity between the two.”

Concerns were also raised about women’s confidence and ability to challenge established structures or advocate for their own interests:

“They are not empowered to advocate for themselves.”

Taken together, these accounts suggest that while opportunities for participation and communication exist, women’s experiences of having their voices heard and influencing decisions are uneven.





Conclusion

Across Bute and Dunoon, it was clear that having services in place did not necessarily mean that it was accessible for women. This came through most strongly in discussions around healthcare, transport, childcare, education and housing. Cost, distance, opening times, availability and personal circumstances all made a difference. Women who had access to a car, more flexible work options or greater financial security were often in a better position to work around these difficulties than those who did not.

Women's experiences also varied within each community. On Bute, some women spoke positively about being able to see a female doctor, while others felt they had been dismissed by male healthcare professionals. Views on education were mixed too, with some describing a range of good opportunities while others felt that the education system was seriously lacking.

A similar picture emerged in Dunoon. Women spoke highly of some specialist healthcare services whilst also emphasising difficulties in getting access to them. Some families had positive experiences of local schools, while others, particularly those with children who needed additional support, faced much greater challenges. Public transport was generally seen as safe, but not always frequent or available enough to meet women's needs. These different experiences are important, as they show that the same service can work well for one woman or family but yet poorly for another.

Another issue that came up across both areas was the need for support to be implemented at an earlier point. Women often felt that help became easier to access once a situation had reached crisis point. This was raised in relation to mental health, healthcare, social care, education and housing. They felt that better support, at an earlier stage, could help prevent problems becoming more serious thereby reducing the knock-on effect on women's work, finances, caring responsibilities and overall wellbeing.

Many of these issues were closely connected. A lack of suitable childcare could make it difficult for women to work or progress in their jobs. When children were not getting the support they needed at school, mothers often had to spend more time advocating for them or take on additional caring responsibilities. Transport affected whether women could get to work, appointments or education, while housing costs and poor-quality housing added further pressure. Living in a rural or island community could make all of these difficulties harder to manage.

The cost of living was also a concern in both places, particularly the cost of food, fuel, transport and housing. On Bute, women spoke about the extra costs that come with island life, including travel and having fewer options for shopping. There were also concerns that poverty could sometimes be hidden. In Dunoon, women focused more on high local prices and the difficulty of balancing household budgets while also wanting to support local independent businesses. In both areas, affordability needs to be looked at alongside local wages, transport costs and the realities of rural living.

Community was one of the most positive themes in both Bute and Dunoon. On Bute, women valued knowing people, receiving informal support and feeling safe, although living in a close-knit community could also mean having less privacy. In Dunoon, women spoke about volunteering, community activities and the importance of having spaces for women, whilst also raising questions about how much influence women felt they had in local decision making.

Community groups, volunteers and informal networks were often helping to fill gaps where formal services were limited. While this support was highly valued, there was concern about how long the same people and organisations could continue carrying that weight of responsibility. Strong communities are an important part of both Bute and Dunoon, but they cannot continue to be expected to make up for gaps in public services.

Overall, the findings suggest that women's experiences in Bute and Dunoon were shaped by the interaction of geography, income, transport, caring responsibilities and access to services. Improving outcomes therefore requires attention not only to whether services exist, but to whether women can realistically access them, receive support early enough and rely on provision that reflects the realities of rural and island life.

10 Key Recommendations

1. **Improve access to routine and preventative women's health services particularly for issues such as menopause, perimenopause, contraception, sexual health and other areas of women's preventative health care.**
2. **Strengthen the continuity of women's healthcare by ensuring clear and reliable follow-up between specialist services and local healthcare providers so that women experience co-ordinated care throughout their treatment and recovery.**
3. **Improve access to mental-health and social-care support by prioritise early intervention, clearer referral pathways and stronger workforce capacity, reducing the over reliance on families and voluntary organisations to coordinate unmet needs.**
4. **Recognise transport as part of an overall service accessibility by co-ordinating ferry and bus connections, journey times, appointment scheduling, travel reimbursement and disruptions when planning and assessing access to services in rural areas.**
5. **Create stronger employment and skills pathways for women by developing realistic routes into sustainable, better-paid employment through training, apprenticeships, career progression whilst also offering appropriate support for small business owners.**
6. **Take an integrated approach to childcare and education by addressing childcare, education, additional support needs and employment collectively and recognising that gaps in provision can directly restrict women's ability to work and achieve economic stability.**
7. **Address the cost-of-living crisis in a rural context by assessing the additional costs of such things as food, heating, fuel and transport against local wages.**
8. **Improve the affordability and suitability of housing alongside the overall availability and supply of homes.**
9. **Strengthen community infrastructure by supporting community organisations, voluntary groups and local spaces whilst also ensuring that this voluntary provision complements, rather than replaces, properly resourced statutory services.**
10. **Strengthen women's voice in local decision-making by creating more opportunities for them to access information, participate meaningfully in local decision-making and develop the confidence and opportunities to advocate for themselves.**

Thank You!

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



For further information or to share your views, please contact:

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