Local Government and Communities Committee

Draft Budget 2018-19

Submission from the Scottish Women’s Convention

The Consultation

The Local Government and Communities Committee will be considering the Scottish Government’s budget for the financial year 2018-19.

Traditionally, Committee Budget Reports are prepared following the publication of the Draft Budget, however, this year the Committee is taking a different approach and reporting in advance. In taking this approach, the Budget Report will not be commenting on budget allocations but will seek to inform budget decisions in advance of these allocations being announced.

Women continue to face inequality throughout Scotland for a number of reasons. The SWC welcomes the call to submit women’s views on matters directly related to them in order that they may influence the Draft Budget. A strategic and cohesive framework which builds on the idea of equality that reflects the women of Scotland should to be implemented across all areas of Scotland.

Women make up 51% of the population. Every piece of legislation that goes through parliament, both reserved and devolved, has a direct impact on women in a fundamentally different way to men due to persisting gender inequality. It is essential that this is acknowledged and scrutinised.

The Scottish Women’s Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women’s Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The SWC engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas.

Following extensive consultation with a wide range of women, the SWC has produced this submission in order to influence a coordinated strategy on issues which directly impact on women throughout Scotland. This submission and has been divided into sections based on the Scottish Government’s National Performance Framework under its “Strategic Objectives” in order to provide an informative and practical response which can be applied to effect within the Draft Budget.
We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe

Priority: Brexit

The Scottish budget should take note of the loss of funding for investment resulting from EU Withdrawal and put plans in place to implement coordinated strategies to offset this. By starting this now, before complete departure, it will ensure that plans are appropriately in place to keep loss of employment to a minimum.

Women throughout Scotland have acknowledged the steps taken by the Scottish Government (SG) towards opening dialogue during the Brexit negotiations. However, fifteen months on from the referendum result, many have expressed fear and uncertainty around the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union.

The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill currently going through Westminster to convert EU legislation into UK law does not explicitly state continued commitment to equality protection upon the transferral of power. Additionally, there is no appeal to ensure that any rulings determined in the European Court will be kept up to date at a UK level following withdrawal.

“Even though technically Brexit doesn’t mean we are outwith the protection of the ECHR, there’s still a worry that our protections will be eroded as a result of the vote. Human rights are universal and guarantee every citizen’s most fundamental freedoms. This cannot be forgotten.”

There is a persistent fear that European funding which goes towards helping communities, particularly in more rural areas, will no longer be available. This could lead to a loss of attraction for investment, resulting in less employment opportunities, which are already significantly harder for women in more localised regions within Scotland.

“We need to know Scotland’s position in negotiations”

Priority: Female Entrepreneurs

Within the future budget, allocation could be made to encourage more women down the path of female entrepreneurship. This could include college courses on business models and strategies with flexible hours such as evening classes. Another point of enquiry for this particular option could be government funded events and mentoring strategies specifically for females, including consideration of the country’s unique resources and skills in order to encourage them to use their significant talents to go down this route.

Entrepreneurship has increased recently with more women deciding to branch out and start their own businesses. The doubling of the funding put in place by the SG to specifically support women-led enterprise is particularly welcomed.

Organisations such as “Investing Women” play a leading role in encouraging more women throughout Scotland to recognise what they can achieve and flourish into successful business owners. This not only improves confidence and employment
opportunities, it also provides a significant approach to lowering of the gender pay gap and contributing towards Scotland’s economy.

**We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people**

**Priority: Care Sector**

*Continued commitment to the living wage for those in the care sector. This should include modifications in light of inflation and rising costs of living.*

Support for the SG’s commitment to paying the living wage to adult care workers has been welcomed. The employment make up within this sector is overwhelmingly female and many have spoken of feeling “devalued” and under intense pressure within this form of work.

“It stands to reason that women who feel valued and supported within the workplace will work harder, yield better results and be more committed.”

**Priority: Childcare**

*Childcare allocation must take into account the many different forms employment can take other than the traditional “9 to 5”. Investment in flexible childcare must be adopted in order to bolster quality employment opportunities for women in Scotland.*

“We’re paying roughly the same every month for childcare as we do for our mortgage. That’s frightening.”

Women have welcomed the SG’s commitment to double the hours of childcare given. This will provide a significant benefit for many. Lack of flexibility, however, is a key barrier for women seeking childcare. Prolonged leave from education and the labour market due to maternity and caring responsibilities often means that women re-enter employment in industries with unsociable, flexible hours, including weekends. Women need free, accessible and flexible childcare in order to ensure sustainable employment.

“Where I work, they’re trying to get people who are on full-time contracts to move to more ‘flexible’ contracts, saying they’ll be good for working parents. They’re really just zero hour’s contracts by another name.”

**Priority: Gender Pay Gap**

*Clearer gendered analysis of part and full time employment. Support for women experiencing “in work” poverty as a consequence of poor working practices. The SG should also look at awarding public procurement contracts only to those employers who can provide details on gender pay and equality statements.*

Women have been particularly vocal on the gender pay gap across Scotland and the impacts it has on their earnings. The specific duties placed on public sector employees under the Public Sector Equality Act to publish gender pay gap statistics where authorities have 20 or more staff has been applauded by many within
communities. However, it is recognised that there is still a huge way to go in order to reduce and subsequently eliminate the pay gap between the sexes, particularly in the private sector.

“The number of women who have gained professional qualifications yet left their sectors of expertise is shameful. Policymakers and employers should be more focused on why this is happening.”

Employment has increased throughout Scotland since the previous year’s budget, most notably within low income households. However, much of this is part time which not only reduces welfare entitlement, but can also lead to a rise in ‘in work’ poverty, particularly for single mothers. Reasons for this are varied but tend to include: lack of affordable childcare, the inflexibility of advertised positions and the reduction of social security due to Westminster’s on going welfare reform.

Problematically, much of the employment undertaken by women tends to occur in lower paid traditionally “female” industries such as cleaning, catering, caring and retail, contributing significantly to the gender pay gap and income inequality in general.

Priority: Intersectionality

*Training for those in the private sector, including sharing of best practices of the Public Sector Equality Duty, to ensure that women with protected characteristics are less likely to be held back from opportunities. Additionally, all Scottish public authorities should be issued with guidance to implement training for employees at all levels around the benefits of diversifying the workforce.*

Women across Scotland have welcomed the extra funding and attention given to those in society who often face “double discrimination” – i.e. due to gender as well as disability or ethnicity.

Language barriers, decent transport and adequate employer training on protected characteristics are some of the factors which impact on women’s employment. This structural discrimination must be taken into account when mapping out potential employment opportunities for females.

“I volunteer in a school as I was a teacher before I came to Scotland. Working with the children helps me to improve my English as well as teaching them. However sometimes I struggle with what the teacher is asking me to do, because of the way she says it or the words she uses.”

Priority: Workplace Discrimination and Harassment

*Further resources provided to counter workplace discrimination and harassment for women. Promotion of the work of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) around workplace discrimination and harassment*

Much of the gendered harassment which takes place within the workplace often goes ignored and unreported due to fear of job losses. This can be particularly prevalent for young women in the likes of the hospitality sector. Not only are these women
underpaid and work unsociable hours, they are ill equipped to deal with threatening and sexual behaviour, which often goes over looked by management. As long as women are seen as unequal in employment and economics they will continue to be seen as unequal in other aspects of society.

**We are better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our research and innovation**

Priority: Apprenticeships

*Continued funding and promotion for modern apprenticeships, including encouraging young women to enter non-traditional training.*

Typically “male” modern apprenticeships (MA’s) are beginning to be viewed more confidently, with more young women undertaking training in the likes of joinery or plumbing. However, the old stereotypes are still there. Taking up an MA in a traditionally male dominated area, young women noted that they tended to be the only female. This can lead to singling out and can be “embarrassing and scary”.

Whilst there has been a slight increase in STEM subjects studied at school by girls and MAs in non-traditional roles for women, work needs to continue to promote and encourage participation.

Priority: Uptake in STEM

*Maintenance of funding for organisations which are created to actively encourage the likes of gendered placements in STEM subjects and annually refreshed guidance for schools on influencing uptake of STEM subjects from a young age for girls.*

Women in Scotland are proud of being part of a country that actively encourages the take up of STEM subjects by young women both in secondary and further education. Funding for organisations which are created to actively encourage the likes of gendered placements is appreciated by women of all ages. These organisations make a huge contribution to ensuring under representation of women is addressed.

“These services are invaluable. The likes of placements encourage participation.”

Young women have been very positive about being encouraged to study male dominated subjects. Schools and teachers are making an effort to support those who want to learn about non-traditional careers.

“You can begin to see the difference now a little bit. The classes are starting to get a bit more 50/50.”

**Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens**

Priority: Discrimination of Young Women

*Increased awareness around minimum wage band discrimination for workers under the age of 25, including drives targeted at private sector employers to recognise*
equal pay for all ages. Annually updated and refreshed employer statistics quoting gender and age segregation in the workplace should also be considered.

Young women often face double discrimination in areas such as employment due to being targeted negatively through the likes of low wage bands and, in turn, for their gender.Whilst the reasoning behind discrimination is vast, the underpinning determinant upon which this rests all stems back to fundamental inequality from an extremely young age.

Priority: Education

Implementation of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee’s recent publication on bullying and its recommendations within education strategies and refreshed updates on this bi-annually.

Young women have reported feeling marginalised due to issues out with their control.

Inclusive education should be implemented with a requirement for all schools to take a proactive approach to tackling gendered bullying. Vulnerable young women are suffering from sexist intimidation and harassment through a lack of reporting and robust anti-bullying strategies. The education of these young women is at risk if support is not provided.

Another key issue for young women is the lack of internet access within the home. Studying is heavily reliant on the internet by most subjects at school and college. Whilst local libraries are thought to be a good way of supporting studies, they often only cater for one hour sessions – which are often too little time for coursework to be completed.

“You tell them you don’t have it and they just say ‘oh well if you don’t, you’ll just need to catch up”

In order for young women to meet their educational attainment, they require additional support from local authorities to overcome challenges. Otherwise, there could be a significant toll on their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Priority: Mutual Respect and Dignity

A revised and inclusive approach to discussions within schools around mutual respect and dignity, including sexual health, social media and sharing of indecent images.

Young women have spoken about gendered abuse they have faced during school hours by fellow classmates; this has become further exemplified by the rise in social media.

Blurring of boundaries has become more common and despite efforts, the rise in the use of the likes of revenge porn by young men has contributed to a negative backlash for gender equality. Alongside this, many young women are feeling increasingly under pressure to conform to notionally accepted societal standards of
sex and sexuality due to ever increasing access to pornography for both boys and girls.

“It’s not just boys. Girls aren’t properly taught what consent is. Situations are happening where it’s basically sexual abuse carried out on them, and they think it’s normal. That’s really scary.”

Women in Scotland have welcomed the SG’s approach to inclusive education, however, more must be done in the realm of sexual health and education. Failure to include a specific framework for this fails to perceive how different aspects of sexual education affect different groups within society. A clear emphasis continuing to focus on diversifying and improving quality sexual education within schools would be welcomed. This should include clear understanding of what constitutes a criminal activity in terms of sexual harassment and assault.

“I think teaching kids to recognise abuse is useful. Even if it’s just communicating to them ‘it’s wrong’ can be a great thing. It means that if it is going on at home, they can speak out and won’t go on to carry it out themselves when they grow up.”

Priority: Violence against Women and Girls

The SG to use its unique influence in order to push for some form of legislation that will commit Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to develop cohesive and legitimate priorities to overcome the problem of gender-based violence, including domestic abuse involving students as victims or perpetrators.

Women have voiced their approval for the Scottish Government’s publication and commitment to the likes of the “Equally Safe” strategy in an attempt to decrease, and eventually eliminate, Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG).

Extra funding already announced in this current year's parliamentary budget has been most welcomed. Provision of such specifically to tackle important areas such as support services for adults and children affected by domestic abuse can be seen as an investment that not only aids victims in escaping these situations, but also for their future.

“We need to rely heavily on it if anything is to be done and the root causes are to be changed”.

However, women still believe that there is a long way to go in order to see some real positive change in the VAWG domain. For example, the majority of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) within Scotland still fail to carry any form of domestic abuse policy. This has an extremely detrimental and potentially life-threatening effect for many young women away from home for the first time.

“More must be done to encourage universities and colleges to challenge gender inequality. It’s all well having codes of conduct, but does that do anything? If it’s not publicised, the issue is put on the back foot.”
Additionally, women have voiced approval for the “Child Equal Protection from Assault (Scotland) Bill” and the commitment by the SG to back this legislation. There is a real danger that young girls who experience physical punishment as youngsters may internalise this as normal and therefore go on to be victims in the likes of abusive relationships at later stages in their life.

**Priority: Young Women and Mental Health**

*Investment in local mental health initiatives specifically tailored for young women as part of a longer term strategy.*

The focus on prevention and early intervention for infants, children and young people is seen as a positive step by women throughout Scotland. Young women today are subject to different pressures which come in many forms, such as through peer groups, families, teachers and the media. They have spoken about the difficulties in challenging stereotypical and unrealistic images presented in the media, as well as peer pressure to conform. The increased use of social media perpetuates views of how young women should look and act. It also allows anonymous comments and images to be posted of impressionable and vulnerable people.

“It always comes back to being the fault of the woman. Either our skirts are too short, we've had too much to drink, we were ‘asking for it’.”

A key issue affecting many young women in Scotland is access to sanitary provision. Stigma surrounding such a topic means many feel unable to speak about not being able to afford products, forcing a number of young women to miss school and other events. The SG’s commitment to making Scotland the first country in the world to provide free access to sanitary provision for young women has been commended by women as a clear pledge of gender equality.

Additionally, there is concern that pressures faced by young women today are tougher than ever before, leading to an exponential increase in mental health issues. The stigma of mental health can often lead to internalisation and fears over speaking up.

**Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed**

**Priority: Continuance of the Baby Box Scheme**

*Continued commitment to universal provision of baby boxes throughout Scotland.*

Women across the country have praised the Scottish Government for the roll out of the universal baby box to ensure all children have the best start possible in life. Use of budgetary funds to provide women with the most essential items needed for the birth of a child sends a clear global statement about the commitment Scotland has to its future generations.

**Priority: Criminalisation of Assault on Children**

*Continued backing from the SG for legislation surround assault on children.*
Women have voiced support for the proposals put forth by John Finnie, MSP, Child (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Bill. Punishment of a physical nature should not be allowed to be justified simply because the perpetrator is the parent or carer of that child.

There is currently a risk of young women accepting physical abuse in relationships in later life due to a “behind closed doors” mentality where there was a perceived normality of physical assault from childhood.

The impact that physical punishment can have on children is wide-ranging and should be explicit grounds for securing extra punishment. Many women have remarked on the fear they have experienced that abuse may become normalised in the eyes of their children.

Priority: Enactment of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill

*Nationwide publicity campaigns to encourage women to report domestic abuse, including the new powers to be enacted under the Bill.*

The SWC commends the provision of a statutory aggravator enshrined within the legislation brought forth within this current Parliamentary year by the SG, which includes provision for child witnesses within domestic abuse situations. The impact that this form of violence can have on children is wide-ranging and should be explicit grounds for securing extra punishment. Normalisation of abuse by children in terms of mental as well as physical abuse is a deep concern for many.

Priority: Implementation of the Best Start Grant

*Targeted promotion of the Best Start Grant to ensure full uptake and raise awareness of the “staggered” payments within the initiative, including emphasis on how this can relieve child poverty.*

Women throughout Scotland have welcomed the announcement of the replacement of Early Years Assistance by this benefit under the new Social Security Bill. Currently, the Sure Start Maternity Grant is a one-off payment which has remained at the same rate of £500 for a number of years despite inflation and rising cost of living.

The SG’s commitment to replacing this with the new, expanded Best Start Grant (BSG) which will pay “staggered” payments to qualifying families £600 on the birth of their first child and £300 on the birth of every subsequent child has been praised for its emphasis on providing for all children. Not only does this go a long way to easing the burden placed on women, particularly single mothers, it also strives towards the elimination of child poverty

Priority: Pregnancy

*Continued funding around post-natal depression and miscarriages, including nationwide publicity campaigns to relieve stigma surrounding the issue. Provision of local pre and post natal services including midwives and health visitors.*
The SG’s continued focus within the Mental Health Framework on early intervention for pregnant women and new mothers is extremely positive. There continues to be a real stigma around post natal depression which can deter many women from seeking help. Too many believe that it is something “which happens to other women”, often because they are not given enough information and guidance during pregnancy.

This can often lead to not just new mothers’ health being put at risk, but also damage bonds and relationships between mother and child. It is vital that this continues to receive priority within healthcare. Furthermore, there is often little support expanded on for women who experience miscarriages. It was felt by many that this was still a rather taboo subject within Scotland. More should be done to understand how widespread this is as well as extra help for those who have been through the ordeal, particularly in rural areas where there is very little support.

Women also need local services in relation to pregnancy. More are currently being centralised including scan appointments and regular pregnancy checks. This can cause problems with travel, time and resources. Local provision, particularly in rural areas, needs to be maintained or enhanced.

**We live longer, healthier lives**

**Priority: Healthcare**

*Increased focus on the geographical make up of Scotland and consultation with local women around budgetary scope for local NHS funding. Further scrutiny of the support available for women suffering from mental health issues to ensure a consistent approach in the best interests of patients.*

The geography of rural Scotland can cause significant inconsistencies in health and social care provision. Hospitals, and other services, including mental health care as well as GP and dental provision have all been reduced at a local level. Services are being centralised to main towns and too many community services have been withdrawn. This is of particular concern to women, who are often the main users of healthcare amenities.

Whilst health funding is at a record high thanks to the SG’s continued focus on NHS Scotland and the continuing integration of health and social care, women have stressed that the problems and inconsistencies between rural and urban Scotland must be addressed in order to ensure fairness in the quality of care.

In addition women can experience mental ill health at various stages in their lives and for varied and diverse reasons. These must be taken into account when the Scottish Government implements actions to deliver its healthcare plans. More must be done to recognise the various levels of support available for those women suffering from mental health issues. Some GPs have been criticised for prescribing medication, as opposed to seeking a holistic approach to treatment.

“*Physical and mental health should be treated equally, but the sad fact is they are not. Everyone has mental health, yet there are issues that are often treated as secondary. Physical health affects mental health and vice versa. This needs to be recognised.*”
Access to services for anxiety and depression, such as talking therapies, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and peer support, is considered “invaluable”. Unfortunately, this type of assistance is not available in all areas of the country. As a result, many are missing out. The increase of those suffering from mental health problems with little or no support at the early stages is also a concern.

It is clear from conversations with women throughout Scotland that the focus on introducing new models of supporting mental health in primary care is vital. Early intervention, for example, is extremely important for both mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Priority: Unpaid Carers

Undertaking of analysis within the scope of the Budget concerning flexibility within the criteria for receiving Carers Allowance. Clearer guidance issued under the newly devolved social security powers concerning unwarranted sanctions on carers for missing appointments due to responsibilities.

Carers, the vast majority of whom are women, save the economy millions of pounds every year, yet are still left undervalued and overworked.

Women feel that there needs to be more flexibility in the criteria for receiving Carers Allowance (CA). The expectation that those who provide care must spend at least 35 hours per week caring, not earn more than £110 per week and not be in full time education is unrealistic.

Whilst the SG’s commitment to topping up CA by £10 weekly once the issue is devolved is welcomed, this still does not take into account the problem many have when it comes to wage caps. This is a persistent problem throughout Scotland and often leaves many women having to make a choice between employment and caring.

“So many women work 35 hours per week and then go home and provide 35 hours of care. It’s as if unless they reach these almost impossible standards, they’re not really caring. This is unfair – carers need to be treated with more respect.”

As well as issues with employment, women have spoken of being sanctioned for benefits when unable to attend appointments or interviews due to caring responsibilities. Carers need to be valued both financially and socially.

We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society

Priority: Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Commissioning of further reviews into the purchasing of sex, most explicitly from the point of safeguarding vulnerable women, including the feasibility of decriminalising selling. This should prioritise consultation with key stakeholders and women directly involved.

It is vital that Scotland takes a zero tolerance stance on the buying of sexual activity. Creating a specific offence against purchasers will strengthen the existing legislative
framework. Scotland should aim to be an unattractive market for those who organise prostitution activities and sexually exploit individuals for commercial purposes. The buying of sexual activity is sexual exploitation and should be recognised as a form of violence against women. Vulnerable individuals are forced into a cycle of exploitation that places them, and their families, at risk.

“People do not associate sex trafficking and prostitution with Scotland and the UK.”

Women throughout Scotland have spoken of their concern that whilst recognised as a form of VAWG, no laws relating to this have been established.

“We need to provide evidence on how sexual exploitation affects everyone in society.”

Anyone who due to social inequalities and poverty is in a situation where they are so desperate that they have to trade their body for money automatically becomes exploited and abused. Failure to tackle the inequalities that allow women to suffer this abuse is an explicit acknowledgement that women can be exploited and traded for economic purposes.

Priority: Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act

Recognition of the pervasiveness of domestic abuse within Scotland, including heightened publicity around the Disclosure Scheme which is still unknown to many women within communities. Increased funding for women’s refuges and frontline services to help women recognise and cope with this vital issue.

Domestic abuse is heavily gendered and is illustrative of the deep-rooted inequality experienced by women through this extreme form of violence. The legislation put forth has been recognised by women as demonstrating the commitment to ensuring that such instances are tackled appropriately. Such a measure sends the message that those who perpetuate such crimes will be adequately punished.

In addition, the implementation of the Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse within Scotland over the past 2 years, has led to a surge in the number of women using this in order to protect themselves and their families from potentially abusive partners.

Priority: Gendered Poverty

Identification and support for vulnerable women in communities, including financial help in order for them to lead meaningful lives.

Whilst ambitious strides have been taken in combating gender inequality within Scottish society, there is still work needed to be done. Socialisation, lack of legislation around key areas and a host of other factors continue to ensure that women miss out on many of the same opportunities faced by men at all stages of life. Women have commended the SG for use of the devolved powers, particularly in the last budget, to ensure equal treatment for all. It is imperative that this continues to be the case so as not to lose any progress that has been achieved.
A main feature of inequality, both in gendered and economic terms, is the restriction of women’s access to certain opportunities that could lift them out of poverty. Women have reported a rise in the use of food banks. The continuous rise in the cost of living has meant that many are struggling to make ends meet.

“This didn’t happen ten years ago. It’s shameful that those with the power to change this do absolutely nothing.”

The employment roles where women predominate are low skilled, part-time and low paid jobs. Women struggle to manage their time and finances, often relying on top-up in-work benefits. The introduction of the National Living Wage has been welcomed. Women are, however, reporting on detrimental changes to contractual conditions and hours to compensate on increased pay.

Priority: Hate Crime Legislation Review

*Hate crime legislation to not only include gender within its remit, but also specifications to enact forms of online abuse on a level with those carried out in person in order to protect women.*

Women across Scotland have been vocal in their welcoming of the current review being undertaken by Lord Bracadale into hate crime legislation. At present, The Offences (Aggravation by Prejudice) (Scotland) Bill, 2009, enacts a statutory aggravator for what it defines as hate crime misdemeanours committed against those with a disability, sexual orientation or transgender identity. This is illustrative of the high degree achieved within Scotland of safeguarding those with protected characteristics. However, the enactment of women as a specific group which can experience discrimination is lacking.

At present, many perpetrators of VAWG can often be overlooked due to the limitations of current legislation. The ways in which criminal conduct can be carried out against women is vast. Implementing a definition that illustrates the many forms gendered abuse can take would highlight the Scottish Government’s continuing commitment in emphasising a zero tolerance approach to VAWG. More convictions and harsher sentences would make clear to those who commit these offences that they will not “get off lightly”.

Many women have voiced concerns over “double discrimination” when being a victim of crime. Under current UK and Scottish law, hate crime is only prosecuted under the protected characteristic, e.g. disability, and not because the victim is a disabled woman. Many feel the law is not on their side when it comes to reporting this behaviour.

The increase of so-called ‘revenge porn’ is having a significant impact on women. The use of various forms of technology and social media, particularly amongst young people, means that images can be anonymously shared to many in a very short space of time. Whilst a specific offence of disclosing, or threatening to disclose, an intimate photograph or film, is addressed under section 2 of the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm Bill, 2016, enacting legislation which places these under hate crime legislation would ensure perpetrators are brought to justice and illustrate the victim-centred response taken by the SG.
It is vital that the SG makes this a priority when carrying legislation into the new budgetary year.

Priority: Sanitary Provision

*Continued use of campaigns to alleviate stigma around menstrual health for women, as well as funding to ensure ease of access to free products.*

Support for the SG’s signal to provide free sanitary provision within schools and colleges is welcomed. The humiliation and health implications felt by many women is illustrative of the stigma still attached to women and one of their most basic health needs.

“Period poverty is the hidden side of poverty.”

**We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk**

Priority: Devolved Social Security

*An independent review commissioned by the SG into the roll out of Universal Credit if Westminster refuses to halt the roll out before all issues are fixed, including loss of income for those gaining employment through the system. In addition, more must be done to address the problems with single streamlined payments for couples, leaving many vulnerable women in abusive relationships at risk of financial abuse.*

It is hoped that the new Social Security (Scotland) Bill will have a significant and positive impact on women throughout Scotland.

The SWC has consulted with women continuously throughout the past year in Scotland over the new Social Security Bill. Women have been vocal in their praise over the guarantee of the likes of universal disability benefits and non means-testing, as well as reform of the current detrimental assessment procedures to end undue stress to claimants.

“If we can get this right, it will be a good way of demonstrating what the Scottish Parliament can do for good.”

Of the total powers to be transferred to Scotland, 85% will still remain at Westminster, including the hugely controversial universal credit (UC). Usage of the limited powers extended to Scotland over UC must be exercised in their entirety. Allowances within the Scottish system such as allowing twice monthly payments and rent paid directly to landlords is a positive step forward which will ease the burden for many women affected by the reforms.

“Women are hardest hit in the benefits system.”

The punitive regime currently in place which takes the form of shaming those most in need of support cannot continue to work. Belittling those that cannot undertake employment due to disabilities or caring commitments cannot be
part of any scheme that hopes to put human rights as the foundation for its approach.

“My mental health issues, much of which stem from abuse in the past, make it very difficult for me to work. There’s no acknowledgment of this in assessment processes, let alone empathy or sensitivity from those asking the questions. If I bring it up, the person gets really uncomfortable, so I just think ‘what’s the point’ and leave it.”

Priority: Welfare Reform

Legislative commitment to prioritise gender within the new social security system. In addition, continued analysis and monitoring of welfare reform from the UK Government and its effect on women specifically.

Cuts to social security by the UK Government over the past few years have left many women and children at risk in Scotland. From application to assessment and onto award, women have had significantly more negative experiences under the current system than they have positive. Women make up the majority of those entitled to social security assistance and, in addition, are by far the ones who have suffered the effects of recent welfare reforms.

“It’s expensive to be poor.”

Continuous assessments by private contractors have led to various and deeply troubling issues with mental and physical health for women. Many of those deemed fit for work from these assessments are found to be incapable upon appeal. This has resulted in further stress and financial burdens on vulnerable individuals.

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessments are seen to be morally denigrating; stressful and take no account of mental health issues. It is crucial that the SG uses new devolved powers to rectify these actions.

“It makes you feel as if you’ve got to justify every aspect of your condition and if you can’t then somehow you’re lying. The guilt that comes with it makes you feel sick to your stomach. All they’re doing is asking the same questions over and over, albeit in a different way each time, as if to trip you up. No wonder people just give up completely.”

We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger

Priority: Access to Justice for Gender-based Crimes

Specific legislation to address the issue of stalking for women. Preventative measures to be funded in order to ensure the safety of victims of gender-based crimes appearing in court to testify.

Sexual assault is on the rise within Scotland. Women are adversely affected by crimes related to sex. Many have voiced their concern that stalking, for instance, still has no legal definition.

“Stalking isn’t taken very seriously.”
The vast majority of victims of all sexual crimes are female and perpetrators male. This has been further exasperated by the rise in digitalisation and social media platforms. Online intimidation and abuse are serious issues which can cause severe problems for many women and can often lead to their lives being put in significant danger.

A suggestion put forth by women would be to include special measures in place for women appearing as victims in court for all forms of gender-related crimes. Fear of having to face the accused is a common reason for women not reporting this behaviour and allowing perpetrators to escape justice.

Women have also praised the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Bill for coming into power during this parliamentary year. Legislation such as this puts Scotland at the forefront of challenging gender inequality, allowing for new laws around the likes of rape and sexual assault. The rise in prosecutions under the Act since coming into effect is tantamount to its success.

“The burden is always on women not to be sexually assaulted.”

Priority: Trafficking

*Enactment of gendered content within all human trafficking models to recognise the extent of exploitation on women through this process.*

The implementation of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 has also been praised by women. Many have noted, however, that the legislation lacks an explicit gendered context for females. Sexual exploitation is the most common purpose of human trafficking. It therefore stands to reason that women make up the majority of victims. Despite this, there is very little recognition of the specific impact of human trafficking on women. The de-gendered approach has the potential to adversely impact on women – as victims, as frontline workers in public services, as those who provide support and assistance to victims and as concerned members of the public.

“If men didn’t seek to buy women’s bodies, there wouldn’t be a need for them to be exploited and abused. If there were no men to buy sex, there would be no prostitution and therefore no trafficking for sexual exploitation.”

We live in well-designed sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need

Priority: Housing

*Funding to further increase social housing builds, alongside increased budgetary commitment to alleviate the problem of homelessness for women.*

Lack of quality, affordable homes whether for rent or to buy is a major issue for women across Scotland, affecting both rural and urban areas. Whilst many have commended the SG for its commitment within budgetary requirements to
continuously strive to build more social housing, they have also raised a number of key issues:

- Investment to deliver more affordable homes for social rent
- Work with key stakeholders to ensure plans to increase the number of homes in urban areas,
- Increased funding for temporary accommodation for homeless women
- A Scottish Government strategy on tackling homelessness with specific reference to protected characteristics

Social housing for family’s needs to be considered. Decent accommodation has a positive impact on women and children’s health and wellbeing, training and employment opportunities, as well as the benefit of social integration.

Problems are not limited to availability, however. Rising living and rent costs have led many women into rent arrears or eviction. With responsibility for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) now transferred to the Scottish Government, it is hoped the process will become more streamlined. The number of households, overwhelmingly women, applying for these payments has increased exponentially to make up shortfalls in rent.

This is due to a variety of reasons, including the roll out of Universal Credit and other welfare reforms. It is vital that the SG recognises its commitment to continue to provide local authorities with the funds needed to ensure women do not end up in rent arrears or, at worse, facing eviction and homelessness.

The enactment of the Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act to provide security for tenants against the likes of excessive rent increases and unreasonable evictions is seen as a pivotal piece of legislation that is welcomed by women throughout Scotland. Given that a large proportion of those in insecurely rented accommodation tend to be young women or single mothers whose incomes can be low and unstable, this is a welcome move.

Priority: Internet Access

*Increased funding by the SG to make all homes in Scotland internet-accessible, regardless of location.*

The SG’s pledge of 100% internet access throughout Scotland by the end of this parliamentary session has been highlighted by women across the country as a major casing point of their own voices being used to form and shape policy.

In terms of access to the likes of such, any strategy for the SG’s plan must take into account a variety of factors which is likely to affect budget costing. For example, the majority of studies will pin point lack of internet as a specifically rural issue due to the likes of connectivity problems.

“They expect you to just have internet.”
However, a number of women in more urban areas such as Glasgow also suffer from this problem. Lack of affordable broadband, is a major issue spanning across all communities within Scotland. Internet provision, as well as being accessible, must be affordable.

**Priority: Transport**

*Continued improvement of transport infrastructure throughout Scotland including increasing access to affordable transport for women, particularly in rural areas.*

Women have also voiced support in the new budgetary term for continued commitment to improving Scotland’s transport infrastructure, particularly in rural communities. This is a major issue for many women in terms of employment, appointments and hospital access and women welcome the Government’s continued commitment to ensure this is a priority.

Many within communities feel that there is room for improvement when it comes to public transport. Buses often have lengthy waiting times, particularly in less centralised areas. This is especially heightened in the evenings with many services stopping or becoming less frequent after 6pm. Many women fear for their personal safety standing alone at a bus stop or having to plan routes or additional buses. This has led to concerns over safety for a number of women. Given the rise in other forms of employment that do not use the traditional “9 to 5” framework, this can be a particularly acute problem with many feeling they have to choose between work and safety.

“*Public transport can be really expensive if you don’t have any help.*”

Older women have also commented on their reliance on the “Concessionary Travel Scheme”. This is seen as a lifeline by many. It allows them free travel within their own area and other communities. This contributes to their ability to be socially active and engaged with their surroundings.

**We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others**

**Priority: Community Engagement**

*Resources to hold events more frequently to encourage women to become actively involved in community projects.*

Community engagement, at a local level, in most areas of Scotland is very positive. Women have noted, however, that there is very little funding available to support local initiatives. Commitment and resources are required in order for local communities to have a positive impact for their residents. Women want to be more involved but without adequate childcare and transport assistance this often proves difficult.

There also needs to be local support and mentoring for women who lack the confidence or skills to participate in community projects.
In order for actions to succeed in which those within communities can play an active role, more must be done on this issue, including raising awareness. This is a particular problem in terms of political representation. Whilst women in Scotland have noted the accessibility of elected representatives to the Scottish Parliament, there is felt that many solutions to problems often present a “one size fits all” and fails to take into account the differences in the likes of geographical make up of Scotland.

Encouraging women to become actively involved within their communities in order to make a difference should be a priority. This could not only provide valued training for individuals, but also bring a much needed confidence boost to many women within these areas.

Priority: Public Services

More investment at a local level in public services.

Lack of funding for public services, particularly in rural parts of Scotland, is an acute problem. Women have reported cuts to libraries, advice agencies and local authority services. This has placed additional burdens on local voluntary services, which are also facing cuts.

“The little of what we do have is stretched to breaking point”.

Women report having to “fill the gap” in ensuring local communities function. An increase in local ad hoc support services, including carers groups, educational support and care in the community initiatives are often organised, voluntarily, by women.

We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity

Priority: Brexit

SG-commissioned studies considering the gender impact of EU withdrawal, including equalities, employment and immigration for women.

As mentioned previously within this response, UK withdrawal from the EU has left many women throughout Scotland feeling uncertain and fearful for the future in terms of equalities, economics and employment.

“I feel we had a sense of community being in the EU, meeting people from other cultures was something we should have been proud of.”

Many immigrant women are now in fear for not just their citizenship, but for their jobs and education. It is vital that the SG uses the full extent of its powers to ensure their voices are heard at every part of the negotiation process and that their rights are not destabilised.

“What is the accountability of those who are making these important decisions for our future?”
A strong gender focus is essential when considering the impact of Brexit. At present, there has been very little information as to how this will impact on women and communities throughout Scotland.

“I feel frustrated, fearful and helpless. We’re already seeing a rise in hate crime and the normalisation of racism. This decision will have an impact on the opportunities and decisions of young people in the future.”

Priority: Human Trafficking

*Increased funding and analysis into human trafficking within Scotland alongside awareness-raising campaigns to combat myths associated with this process.*

In addition, Britain’s current place within the EU means that crimes such as trafficking can be dealt effectively across European borders. Elimination of these vital rights derails from a European strategy and may lead to an increase in VAWG within the country.

“If there is no obligation for these important measures to be adhered to. There’s a real possibility that the UK Government won’t see fit to do anything to ensure they’re being carried out domestically. If this happens, it will be a step back in time for women’s rights.”

Particular concerns surrounding the likes of the coordinated efforts that exist at present across European borders to counter crimes such as human trafficking have been highlighted as posing a major danger for women when Britain leaves the EU. Framing this as a priority should be essential and debated as such in Parliament following EU withdrawal in order to give women basic human rights.

Priority: VAWG and European Funding

*Mitigation of funding lost through EU withdrawal for essential services.*

A number of important issues have been raised over fears that specialist services in place to aid victims of Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) will have limited provisions due to a loss of European funding. The value of these services is undeniable. The provision of refuge accommodation, as well as assistance with applications for housing, welfare benefits and other support mechanisms allow women to recognise, survive and exit abusive relationships. VAWG services allow women and their children to move forward with their lives. Funding for these should continue and under no circumstances be cut, despite tightening budgets across the public and voluntary sectors.

“I wouldn’t be where I am today without the support and assistance I’ve had from these services. They saved my life.”

Our people are able to maintain their independence as they get older and are able to access appropriate support when they need it

Priority: Concessionary Travel
Continued funding for travel schemes for older women.

Women have commented on the importance of the concessionary travel card which allows older people to access free bus travel throughout Scotland. This allows women to engage with friends, families and communities, ensuring social engagement. This in turn has a positive impact on health and wellbeing, diminishing the need for local and national health and social care services.

Priority: Fuel Poverty

Continued funding of fuel poverty mitigation, including awareness campaigns and guidance to increase uptake.

The Scottish Government’s commitment within its new remit in social security to tackle fuel poverty throughout Scotland is welcomed. Cold Weather and Winter Fuel Payments, respectively, are seen as two pieces of welfare that make a significant difference to many people’s health in the winter months.

Having these as two similar but separate forms of assistance is extremely important within the context of Scotland. This ensures that not only are provisions made for the winter months, but also for periods of cold weather out with the season. It is hoped that this will help tackle fuel poverty, especially in rural areas of the country.

Priority: Pensioner Poverty

Funding for local services to support older women to claim entitlements such as pension credits, housing and council tax financial assistance.

Women struggle financially throughout their working lives. Many do not have the resources to contribute to a pension scheme and rely on basic pension rights on retirement.

With cuts to local services, many older women do not know their rights to claim “top up” pension benefits. Any additional income would assist with the health and wellbeing of these individuals, resulting in positive community outcomes.

Priority: Unpaid Caring

Increased resources for those involved in unpaid caring, including access to respite

Scotland, like other regions within the UK, faces a significant challenge over an increasingly aging population and the adaption of the likes of health and social care services in order to accommodate this. Women have spoken about the commonality of “sandwich caring” within Scotland, which more often than not falls under the remit of stereotypical “women’s work” entailing care for the likes of elderly relatives as well as their own children or grandchildren.

In circumstances such as this, more must be done in order to ensure that women do not face any unnecessary burdens which put their own health, both physical and mental, at risk. Changes in care needs should be a top priority and it must always be emphasised that any changes that have an impact on the cared-for, also do for those...
undertaking care. Women are too often undervalued within society for the sheer volume of unpaid care work they undertake, more often than not at the detriment to their own mental and physical health with no respite.

Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people’s needs

Priority: Carers

Renewed economic investment in the care sector including value-based initiatives for carers to increase recruitment and retention.

The care sector within Scotland continues to face challenges posed by cuts to funding and the added pressure of extra responsibilities for many employees within the industry. Whilst women have recognised that the SG is undertaking considerable reform within this sector in order to place higher value on those within it, other challenges still remain. The threat of Brexit to NHS staffing recruitment levels, for example, is an on going issue which many women have voiced concerns over.

“Paid carers that are valuable to the profession need to be retained.”

Caring should be seen as a valuable occupation for people to go into that promises career development. This could include studying before being able to go into the profession.

Priority: NHS Provision

Increased funding to halt the centralisation of services where possible.

Women have spoken out about both positive and negative experiences they have had when using Scotland’s NHS services. Many have commented on the advice, guidance and assistance provided by GPs, midwives, health visitors and other healthcare professionals. However, others have noted that provisions for certain services are dependent on location with it something of a “postcode lottery”, benefitting women in certain areas. Expansion has the potential to ensure that this care is more widespread.

Many have spoken of NHS services which are being centralized. Whilst this may be a financial decision, it often has a negative impact on service users, particularly in rural locations. Access to local midwives, healthcare workers and dentists are paramount in ensuring the health and wellbeing of Scotland’s women and children. These should remain local where possible.

Priority: Support Services

Funding over a sustained period of time to allow for continuation of services.

Women who have experienced domestic abuse or commercial sexual exploitation require local, specialist support services. These need to be recognised and inform a cohesive strategic framework across all public services.
Conclusion

The SWC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee concerning the forthcoming Draft Budget for 2018/19. This report uses the voices of women across all levels of society within Scotland. The focal points laid out within this response highlight the persistent discrimination faced by women. Progress needs to be built upon. The issues, concerns and ideas of women throughout the country need to be listened to. This, in turn, has the potential to significantly improve matters for women’s rights within Scotland.

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