

2024

ROADSHOW

Dundee

April 2024



The Scottish Women's Convention

Introduction

On the 18th of April 2024, the SWC team travelled to Dundee, speaking with women from the city and the wider region. The purpose of our visit was to understand the issues that these women face, with key themes arising throughout conversations.

Women in Dundee highlighted a range of issues, with healthcare emerging as the key concern. Gaps in primary care were raised, as well as poor mental healthcare and insufficient gynaecological/maternity services. Women also believed that proposed changes to education was likely to detrimentally impact children, particularly those with limited financial means and children with additional support needs.

In addition, attendees proposed that there were issues with regards to Dundee's general infrastructure and economy. Women suggested that their safety was at risk through changes to streetlighting and unreliable public transport. Also, they believed that the housing market in Dundee was becoming increasingly hostile to buyers, renters and landlords. Furthermore, the issue of low-quality work was raised, with women being poorly paid and experiencing disadvantage due to caring responsibilities. Attendees proposed that this fuelled poverty across the region, ultimately worsening the local economy.

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.

Healthcare

When speaking with women in Dundee, they stated concern surrounding GP availability and service-provision. It was highlighted that current appointment management methods, whereby patients phone in the morning to organise an appointment for that same day did not allow for flexibility, and often clinics would run out of slots. Alternatively, practices would offer telephone consultations, however women generally viewed these as insufficient, expressing a preference for face-to-face appointments. Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership (Dundee HSCP) data shows that nearly 90% of all patients surveyed had been offered a telephone appointment, with only 65% offered an in-person appointment¹. This shows clear dominance of telephone consultations, despite low satisfaction levels across patients.

Furthermore, those in attendance explained that when they attempted to organise appointments, they were discouraged by receptionists. The role of receptionists as gatekeepers to treatment has been regularly raised by women across SWC events, with women in Dundee explaining that they did not feel comfortable expressing their health concerns to non-medical staff members. In the Dundee HSCP report referenced above, 43% of respondents stated that they believed service-provision could be improved through increased privacy at reception, further highlighting this concern. The resulting consequence of both poor in-person appointment availability and a lack of privacy is a reluctance to organise and attend appointments, worsening women's physical and mental wellbeing. Dundee City has a lower life expectancy for women than the Scottish average, 79.1 years compared to 80.8 years². Women in Dundee City also experience a lower level of healthy life expectancy, 58 years, than the UK average, 63.9³. It is therefore vital that further consideration is given to women's experiences of primary care in an effort to improve health outcomes.

- "...if you call [the GP clinic] at eight, you're lucky if you get an appointment that day, you might not even get a reply."
- "Even if you do get a call, you'll just get a telephone consultation as well."
- "...if you've got a mum who has two or three kids to drop off at school, maybe different schools, she doesn't have an hour to make those phone calls."
- "...you're having this conversation with someone who has no medical background...you're telling this receptionist...And they have absolutely no medical training."

Women went on to highlight the lack of sufficient dentistry services across Dundee. They explained that organising appointments had become increasingly difficult since the Covid-19 pandemic, and some believed that moves to a yearly check-up from a six-monthly check would have a negative impact on oral health more widely. Women also recounted stories of care during the pandemic, stating that the use of technologies, such as telephones, pictures and videos, did not effectively manage conditions. This had caused significant distress for some patients, resulting in worse health outcomes. It is clear that the pandemic has had a debilitating impact on dentistry across Scotland, with patient participation levels struggling to recover to pre-Covid

¹ Dundee HSCP. (2023). Public Consultation on General Practice Premises Strategy. Available at:

[https://www.dundeehscp.com/sites/default/files/2023-](https://www.dundeehscp.com/sites/default/files/2023-06/Evaluation%20of%20Public%20Consultation%20on%20Dundee%20GP%20Premises%20Strategy%202023.pdf)

[06/Evaluation%20of%20Public%20Consultation%20on%20Dundee%20GP%20Premises%20Strategy%202023.pdf](https://www.dundeehscp.com/sites/default/files/2023-06/Evaluation%20of%20Public%20Consultation%20on%20Dundee%20GP%20Premises%20Strategy%202023.pdf)

² National Records of Scotland. (2022). Dundee City Council Area Profile. Available at:

https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/council-area-data-sheets/dundee-city-council-profile.html#Life_Expectancy

³ Office for National Statistics. (2021). Subnational Indicators Explorer: Dundee City. Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/subnationalindicatorsexplorer/2022-01-06#S12000042>

levels. However, it can be said that the declining trend in dentistry has been ongoing for some time: Public Health Scotland have found that in September 2022 only approximately 50% of adults had seen an NHS dentist within two years, with this dropping from 98% in September 2006⁴. When one considers that during that timeframe the number of registrations across Scotland has increased from 1.9 million to 4.3 million, improved investment and prioritisation is clear.

In order to mitigate the declining service-provision on offer across dentistry in Dundee, women stated that they were increasingly turning to private options. Some attendees explained that this went against their personal values, highlighting the value of the NHS, however, felt that they were left with little choice. Women believed that the increase in privatisation was directly linked with a lack of proper financing, as well as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Recent changes introduced by the Scottish Government in 2023 to retain dentists have attempted to streamline processes for staff – reducing the number of treatment codes financially included through the NHS from approximately 500 to 45⁵. The impact of these changes must therefore be closely monitored, with there being some risk of increased costs to women across Scotland, particularly when partnered with the general increase in private services as reported by women in Dundee.

- “My daughter had an abscess in her gum [during the Covid-19 pandemic] ...they told me to take a picture, I sent that to them and got some antibiotics. They then finished, I phoned again, they asked for another picture and told me it was gone. But actually, it had gone under the gum, and she ended up getting eight teeth removed. Eight.”
- “I think most people have to go private for their dentists now. It’s privatisation through stealth!”
- “...I think that dentists want to stay in the NHS, but it’s not financially viable for them.”

Additionally, women had negative views in relation to mental healthcare in Dundee. They explained that the current stresses on the overall mental health system were contributing to poor outcomes for people across the region. Dundee HSCP figures show that new referrals to all forms of psychological therapies have increased from 2,954 in the final quarter of 2021/22 to 3,500 in the final quarter of 2022/23. This dataset also highlights that between quarter two and quarter three of 2022/23 there was a significant drop in the percentage of patients referred to psychological therapies commencing their treatment within 18 weeks of referral, dropping from 76% to 55%⁶. Similar findings can be seen when one considers child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), with the percentage of CAMHS patients being treated within 18 weeks from referral sitting at 55.5% in March 2023, despite national targets being set at 90%⁷.

Attendees went on to highlight the differing mental health experiences of women and men. Women explained that they were aware of the increased risk of suicide and poor mental health in men, however, they explained that despite this, women’s needs should not be sidelined. Women in Scotland’s average mental wellbeing scores fell between 2019 and 2021 from 49.7 to 48.3, a larger drop than that experienced by men over the same period⁸. Through targeted

⁴ Public Health Scotland. (2023). Dental Statistics – NHS Registration and Participation. Available at: <https://publichealthscotland.scot/media/17353/2023-01-24-dental-report.pdf>

⁵ Scottish Dental Magazine. (2024). Reader Survey Confirms a Shift from NHS to Purely Private Practice. Available at: <https://www.sdmag.co.uk/2024/05/27/reader-survey-confirms-shift-to-private-practise/>

⁶ Dundee HSCP. (2024). Mental Health Performance. Available at: <https://www.dundeehscp.com/sites/default/files/2023-07/PAC20-2023%20Mental%20Health%20Performance%20Appendix.pdf>

⁷ NHS Tayside. (2023). Tayside Health Board and Annual Report and Accounts for Year Ended 31 March, 2023. Available at: https://www.nhstaysidecdn.scot.nhs.uk/NHSTaysideWeb/idcplg?IdcService=GET_SECURE_FILE&dDocName=PROD_372444&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&noSaveAs=1

⁸ Scottish Government. (2022). The Scottish Health Survey 2021. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-health-survey-2021-volume-1-main-report/pages/7/>

gendered approaches, women in Dundee believed that the disparity in service-provision for women suffering from poor mental health could be reduced. For example, attendees suggested that a change in the location of services was a simple solution, with women being less likely to access out-of-town support centres. Instead, they highlighted the work of Wellbeing Works, with this premises being relocated to the city centre, enabling easy access for women. This links with ideas presented by attendees - that third sector organisations continue to provide vital alternatives for those in crisis while they await NHS services, despite continued budget cuts. They therefore believed that sustained funding for the third sector was key in improving mental wellbeing in Dundee.

- “I would say that it [mental healthcare] is terrible. Absolutely terrible.”
- “...Wellbeing Works, which is now on the high street, in one of the retail areas, they’re interacting more with women...now they’re in that high street position, it’s women.”
- “...they’ll say that they’ll fund a five-tier recovery programme for a year or two...but then the funding stops...That’s the key problem with the third sector, we start up stuff to support people, and then the funding stops, you can’t get funding.”

Throughout discussions with women in Dundee the idea of patient experience arose. Many women recalled negative experiences while accessing a multitude services, for example dentistry and GPs. However, the poor treatment of women in relation to highly sensitive procedures, such as gynaecological and maternity care, compounded a clear sense of discontent and mistrust of medical services. Women recounted occurrences where they felt embarrassed, with the use of mobile breast screening units as check-up facilities being given as one example. Additionally, attendees highlighted cervical screening (smear tests) as an area where poor education surrounding the medical practice has created a difficult environment for survivors of sexual assault/trauma. During conversations, one attendee advocated for improved communication of patient’s rights, with it becoming evident that patients can request to insert the speculum used during the procedure themselves⁹. This was received positively by other women in attendance, with further review into this process being valuable to the improvement of gynaecological care in Scotland.

Women also told SWC staff of maternity incidents which were clearly distressing. Some stated that they had felt ignored and belittled by maternity staff members, with their concerns regularly dismissed - this was associated with the method of birth, as well as induction. NHS data shows that the number of live births at 37 to 42 weeks induced has steadily increased since 2003/04, with the same being true of caesarean sections¹⁰. This can be accounted to a change in the overall make-up of expectant mothers’ age and health over time, however, women in Dundee proposed that the culture present in some maternity services, contributed to a removal of women’s bodily autonomy.

- “...I’m at the age where I have to get mammograms...I got my appointment...and it was one of those big vans in a carpark and had ‘breast screening’ written across it...I felt so small.”
- “...when I go to my smear test, I’ll tell them that I will put the speculum in myself, and a lot of women don’t realise that they can do that”
- “...giving birth at the hospital here, both times, they weren’t great, they didn’t listen to me about my own body.”

⁹ Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust and Rape Crisis. (2023). Cervical Screening after Sexual Violence. Available at: <https://www.jostrust.org.uk/information/cervical-screening/cervical-screening-after-sexual-violence>

¹⁰ Public Health Scotland. (2023). Births in Scotland. Available at: https://publichealthscotland.scot/media/23935/2023-11-28-births-report_final.pdf

Education

During discussions around education, women expressed concern regarding announcements to reduce the number of teachers across the Dundee City region. It is estimated that Dundee City Council, in an attempt to recoup financial resources, will remove 32 teachers across primary and secondary schools¹¹. Attendees were worried about how this would impact children and young people's learning, with the current education system struggling to maintain good performance. They stated that the reduced staffing levels may also disproportionately impact children experiencing poverty, with this group being less likely to access vital support, such as breakfast clubs or the occasional luxury, like school trips. This lack of support was also viewed as an issue which would extremely impact children with additional needs, with support staff struggling to manage their increased workload. Women highlighted that the burn-out experienced by teachers across Scotland, as well as that seen within additional support staff, ultimately, negatively impacted children.

- “Dundee has been told that they've got to drop 30 teachers this year, but they're still going to have the same number of pupils.”
- “...all those extras that they're [children] getting at school, maybe the odd day out...that's all going to be eradicated.”
- “And like even the kids coming up from primary seven...I mean they should have maybe been sent to more specialised services...And I've got parents who want their kids in that enhanced learning space, but the support staff have been cut, so I just can't do it”

Women also brought attention to the radically changing population demographics seen in Dundee over recent years and how this impacts education. Initial data from the delayed Scottish 2021 census shows that, overall, the ethnic minority population in Scotland has increased from 8.2% in 2011 to 12.9% in 2022¹². Meanwhile over that same period in Dundee, the number of ethnic minority individuals has increased from 5.97% of the population to 10.14%¹³. Attendees explained that despite expanded multiculturalism, this was not always reflected across schools, with the curriculum maintaining a Scottish-centred approach, impacting pupils' senses of identity. They did however state that bilingual services were good, asserting that this was particularly valuable for migrant and refugee women/children. Women generally, hoped that education systems could continue to develop, reflecting the changing demographics seen across Scotland.

- “...but there are so many more people, people from different backgrounds, more languages. I work with a lot of these kids from other countries, but there is no agency really supporting them”
- “...I mean on the flip side, I feel like we make an effort with Christmas and Easter and stuff, the kids at school as well, but they don't really try for Eid. Some schools anyway...it would be good if they made more of an effort to make all the kids feel comfortable.”
- “They do have bilingual support; Dundee's service is pretty good to be honest.”

¹¹ The Courier. (2024). 32 Teacher Posts Could Face Axe as £2m Worth of Savings Necessary. Available at: <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-courier-advertiser-angus-and-the-mearns-edition/20240227/281573770636813>

¹² National Statistics. (2024). Scotland's Census 2022 – Ethnic Group, National Identity, Language and Religion. Available at: <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/2022-results/scotland-s-census-2022-ethnic-group-national-identity-language-and-religion/>

¹³ National Statistics. (2024). Scotland's Census: Search Census Data. Available at: <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/search-the-census#/search-by>

When questioned on local educational opportunities, women stated that due to the plentiful further and higher education organisations in Dundee, such as the University of Dundee, Abertay University and Dundee & Angus College, young women had good options. Attendees explained that within high schools, universities and colleges are highlighted as viable options for young people, to improve their personal and professional skillset. The most recent data on university entrants to the University of Dundee, shows that approximately 22.5% of undergraduate students are from either the City of Dundee or Angus region, while this figure is 33.5% for Abertay University¹⁴. Due to the many educational sites, young women have a vast range of options, varying from business to gaming development. Moreover, it was explained that the universities/colleges created improved amenities for citizens, and that the local economy was boosted by students moving to the area.

- “...a lot of local people do go to uni, I mean you will get people who want to go elsewhere...I do think we try and big up the opportunities at the university for the school girls.”
- “...the university is good for our economy, because it brings students in from other areas, you know, the pubs and stuff are busy, which we really need.”

However, attendees did state that options for young women hoping to enter construction and men-dominated professions remain limited. Across Scotland, women represented only 37.6% of Modern Apprenticeship (MA) starts in 2023/24, however, when Constructed and Related Frameworks are removed from the equation, women make up 49.2% of MA starts across Scotland¹⁵. Those who work with young women explained that entering college to obtain qualifications in plumbing, electrical work, etc. still face many barriers, with this group feeling intimidated by the lack of women on and teaching courses. Gendered expectations were found to be a significant contributor to misogyny, as found through the SWC’s [STEMinism Conference report](#), with the continued gendered norms across learning environments actively preventing women from entering certain sectors. Attendees found this disparity to be discouraging and a clear area in which the Scottish Government should attempt change.

- “Yeah, I mean you do get some girls who are interested in going into the trades, but because it is so dominated by boys...it’s too much for them, because they’re the only girl. And that’s just unfair because that’s what they want to do.”
- “...sometimes they’re confident in school, but as soon as they’re out of their comfort zone...they don’t want to be in the room, it’s embarrassing as well [being the only girl].”



¹⁴ HESA. (2023). Table 59 – UK Domiciled HE Students by HE Provider and Domicile 2015/15 to 2021/22. Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-59>

¹⁵ Skills Development Scotland. (2024). Modern Apprenticeship Statistics. Available at: https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/a5vlls0s/modern-apprenticeship-statistics-quarter-4-2023-24.pdf?_gl=1*ato9jo*_up*MQ..*_ga*MjEzNjI4NjM2Ni4xNzE2OTk3NzI3*_ga_2CRJE0HKFQ*MTcxNjk5NzcyNS4xLjAuMTcxNjk5NzcyNS4wLjAuMA..

Infrastructure

While discussing the general infrastructure of Dundee with attendees, they highlighted recent changes made to street lighting. Over recent years, Dundee City Council have aimed to reduce energy consumption through the implementation of LED streetlamps, converting 98.5% of lamps. This has resulted in Dundee consuming the lowest amount of electricity and CO2 emissions per streetlight compared to any other Scottish city as of 2022¹⁶. Many of the women at our Roadshow event felt that these streetlights were dull and contributed to a feeling of insecurity while traversing the city centre. It can be said that LED lights are generally brighter than traditional streetlamps, however, the quality of light can be inconsistent, causing increased glare and eye discomfort. This has been known to cause a ‘fogging effect’, which is particularly problematic for older people and can mean that general visibility can be worse under white LED lighting¹⁷. Women were generally in favour of improved environmentalism across Dundee, however, felt that this should not be prioritised over safety.

- “...street lighting. I just don’t feel safe, they’re so dull...You just can’t see people in front of you, or you can’t see the curb edge.”
- “I can go to meetings that go on to nine at night...but the streetlights are really dim...And I think that that’s maybe putting women’s safety, or anybody’s safety, at risk.”

Housing

Women provided information on the state of housing in Dundee, explaining that there are consistent developments. In 2022, there were 524 new homes built, the second highest number in a single year since 2009, with 198 of these being affordable housing association completions, and 308 constructed by private companies¹⁸. The prevalence of private developments was raised by women, with attendees stating that they felt there was a focus on new homes, rather than redevelopments of empty lots. It has been estimated that there are 1,067 long-term empty (LTE) homes in Dundee, making up 2.31% of Scotland’s LTE homes¹⁹. Women suggested that there should be an increased focus on redevelopment across Dundee, which could assist in increasing job availability for tradespeople, as well as improving living conditions for those residing in less affluent areas.

- “It would be good for them to just renovate the houses that they’ve got, you know, it would give us housing, but also some employment, you know, the electricians, the plumbers, etc.”
- “Maybe some of the empty homes are in areas that are problematic, areas that people don’t want to move into...so they don’t want to spend the money and it just brings the area down even more.”

Women also believed that the private rental market in Dundee was under strain. They began by explaining that changes to rent policy had detrimentally impacted private landlords, and some

¹⁶ Road Maintenance Partnership Manager and Street Lighting Partnership Manager. (2024). Road and Street Lighting Annual Performance 2022/23. Available at:

https://www.dundee.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/road_and_street_lighting_annual_performance_2022_23.pdf

¹⁷ Rider, G. (2023). The Pros and Cons of Different Approaches to LED Street Lighting. Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368771305_The_pros_and_cons_of_different_approaches_to_LED_street_lighting

¹⁸ Dundee City Council. (2023). Housing Land Audit. Available at:

https://www.dundee.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/cd_hla2023_final_accessible.pdf#:~:text=The%20Housing%20Land%20Audit%202023%20reveals%20that%20over,annual%20completion%20figure%20in%20the%20last%20ten-year%20period.

¹⁹ Scottish Empty Homes Partnership. (2023). Where are Scotland’s Long-Term Empty Homes? Available at:

<https://emptyhomespartnership.scot/where-are-scotlands-long-term-empty-homes-copy/>

private tenants, as the increase in regulation and rent controls had caused some homeowners to sell their properties. This caused some tenants to become dependent on social housing alternatives, with the general lack of housing seen across Dundee preventing them from accessing residences. Additionally, rent prices across Dundee and Angus have increased to £800 in 2024, an increase of 11.4% since 2023, with this being higher than the Scottish average of 10%²⁰. When this is partnered with a decrease in private landlord options, the private rental situation for women in Dundee is poor and results in increased strain on social housing. Women hoped to see improved support for landlords, to create a varied housing market across Dundee.

- “Over the last few years, we have experienced that... people coming to us [housing association] because their landlord has sold up and they need somewhere to live.”
- “...like the Government could be supporting landlords to provide more housing, they could still be helping to keep landlords in, rather than pushing them out.”

Transport

When questioned on transport options in the area, women in Dundee had mixed views. Generally, they explained that the size of Dundee enabled active travel options, and that there had been recent developments which had benefited locals and visitors. This includes a bus shuttle to Edinburgh Airport, as well as the recent free bus passes for under 22s. It was felt that this bus pass enabled young people to socialise and commute to education/employment and was overall positive. Some women did however hold some concern around whether the pass was being used in an incorrect manner by some young people, with the increased visibility of youngsters on buses creating some uneasiness for local women.

- “It’s a quite nicely sized city, you can easily get to other cities as well, there’s so much around. I love my commute to work.”
- “They started a really good service about five years ago, like a line right to Edinburgh Airport, and that has been so popular, it’s amazing.”
- “The free bus pass for the youngsters is great to be honest.”

However, some women did feel that bus provision had been cut to some areas in Dundee. They explained that more affluent areas were well-serviced, while locales with low affluence were omitted in public transport planning. This was seen as a particular issue for older women, with this group being more likely to depend on bus services to actively take part in society. Women highlighted that this could have a detrimental impact on older women’s mental health. Furthermore, attendees also quoted experiences where buses were unreliable and infrequent, particularly during the evenings/night. This contributed to a general sense of unsafety, with [SWC work around transport](#) in May 2024 coming to similar conclusions.

- “It [bus routes] depends in Dundee...like I’ve got good bus networks, but there are other areas that don’t have bus provision anymore...And then as well, you’ve got areas which don’t have any provision, so for like elderly people, they don’t have anything.”
- “I’d say that some of the buses are unreliable.”
- “I wouldn’t say that the buses are great late at night”

²⁰ Office for National Statistics. (2024). Housing Prices in Dundee. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/S12000042/>

Employment and Economy

Attendees raised the issue of poverty in Dundee, stating that the increases to costs of living had created a precarious situation for many families. Women highlighted the experiences of children and the increase of in-work poverty as being central to poverty debates. Current figures show that 36.5% of Dundee City’s population live within the 20% most deprived areas, as shown through the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)²¹. The utilisation of the SIMD was raised by attendees in Dundee, with women believing that this measurement did not create an accurate picture of poverty, overlooking areas across the city. Through the SIMD the Scottish Government split Scotland into 6,976 data zones and use a sliding scale from one to ten to measure deprivation. See Figure 1 for a visualisation of SIMD mapping, with dark red highlighting areas considered to be the most deprived. Deprivation is assessed by considering seven key areas: income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime and housing²². This measure can be criticised for its ability to generalise, ignoring small pockets of poverty within wealthier regions, which can make accessing support services increasingly difficult within these areas. Women called for the use of more accurate data collection techniques, alongside proper consideration of the lived experience of those in poverty.

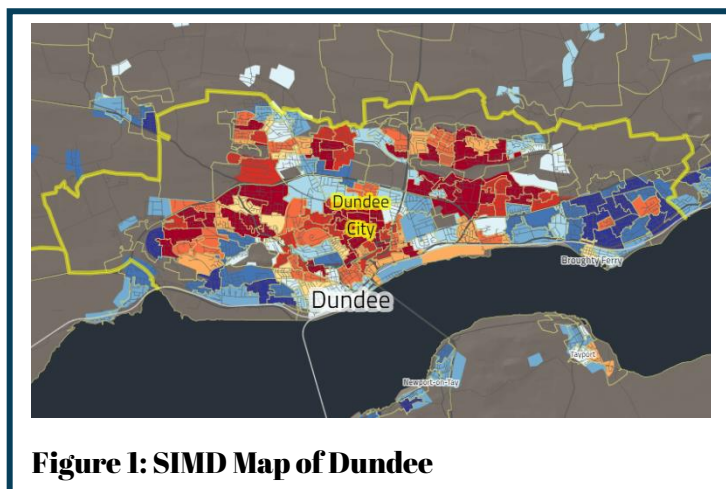


Figure 1: SIMD Map of Dundee

An alternative approach has been developed, the Minimum Income Standard (MIS), which considers the income a household requires to “reach a minimum of socially acceptable standards of living in the UK today”²³. This method can also be altered by region, with general costs of living varying across the country. Overall, reconsideration of poverty data is required, with the lived impact playing a key role in increasing our understanding as to why the prevention of poverty is vital to the development of Scotland’s economy.

- “I think the postcode as well, for me...A lot of people think because I live there, I’m affluent...but actually now, I’m on benefits, and I have two disabled children, and so there’s not a lot of support then in that area because of that.”
- “...there’s so many kids at school now that are living such fragmented lives with poverty, that they go to school to be looked after...Bairns are going to school, they’re not eating, they’re not getting their breakfast.”

²¹ Dundee City Council. (2023). Dundee Poverty Profile 2023. Available at: https://www.dundee.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dundee_poverty_profile_2023_0.pdf

²² Scottish Government. (2020). Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020/>

²³ Padley, M. and Stone, J. (2023). A Minimum Income Standard for the United Kingdom in 2023. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/a-minimum-income-standard-for-the-united-kingdom-in-2023>

- “...before Covid, it [foodbank] was for people who were on benefits, and then from that it then moved to in-work poverty. We had nurses come in, whose mortgages had gone up, who were trying to feed three children”

The employment situation was also discussed by women in Dundee, with attendees highlighting that there was a lack of opportunities for women. Dundee City region has the highest level of unemployment rate in Scotland, 6.4%, with employment rates continually decreasing year on year since 2020²⁴. Of those in work 36.8% are in part-time employment, 4.1% higher than the Scottish average, and women in full-time work are paid £52.30 less than the Scottish average²⁵. These figures consolidate the opinion of attendees, with the general working quality in Dundee being poorer than that experienced elsewhere. Women believed that overall working conditions should be improved for those in part-time, low-paid employment, with many of these workers being fellow women.

- “I think there are still a lot of low-paid jobs in Dundee; minimum wage, hospitality sector, the care staff in schools...You can’t live off it”
- “But I mean the [care] staff aren’t getting paid despite that skill...The fees for care homes are horrendous, but the staff are all on minimum wage...Although, if they’re with a council one, then the pay is better to be fair”

Attendees went on to highlight the significant discrimination women face in the workplace more generally, believing that women’s continued over-representation in part-time employment and low pay is fuelled by little consideration of caring responsibilities. They explained that the lack of suitable childcare provision prevents women from taking on some roles, and that time taken for maternity leave actively worsens women’s career prospects. Similar issues were found to be the case during [SWC work around childcare](#) in Scotland, with women calling for reviews of early learning and childcare provision, as well as equity across maternity and paternity leave. Women went on to highlight the impact this has on student loans, explaining that during maternity leave, some student loan repayments are still made, further entrenching women’s financial disadvantage. Suggestions were made to pause loans, with this being particularly pertinent as time passes: at the beginning of the financial year 2023-24, the average higher education borrower’s loan balance on entry was £15,430, whereas in 2007 this figure was only £6,080²⁶. This rapid increase in amounts borrowed places future generations of women at increased risk of financial instability.

- “There’s an institutional bias against women, and part of that is to do with the fact that we often have to break careers due to caring responsibilities.”
- “...you often have done two or three hours of care work, before you get to ‘work, that’s just the thing of being a woman.”
- “...when women go off on maternity leave, we also go off to university, we do our degrees...but when we’re off looking after the kids for a year, that’s it. Our loans become bigger and bigger...Even if they could pause them when you’re on maternity leave...that would be great.”

²⁴ Office for National Statistics. (2024). Employment, Unemployment and Economic Inactivity in Dundee City. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/labourmarketlocal/S12000042/>

²⁵ Office for National Statistics. (2023). Labour Market Profile – Dundee City. Available at: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157411/report.aspx#workless>

²⁶ Student Loans Company. (2023). Student Loans in Scotland: Financial Year 2022-23. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/student-loans-in-scotland-2022-to-2023/student-loans-in-scotland-financial-year-2022-23#HLBalance>

Women also spoke about the lack of opportunities for migrant and refugee women, explaining that this group can struggle to easily access employment or reskilling prospects. It was highlighted that many women who move to Scotland have a range of valuable skills, however, are greatly limited in how they can be used. They were appreciative of legal boundaries surrounding work but believed that more could be done to assist these women to develop and meaningfully contribute to society. Attendees suggested workshops within communities, where skills and knowledge could be exchanged, alongside the general promotion of these women to improve their employment/voluntary options.

- “In our workshops, a lot of women who came as a migrant, they have an employment problem as well...they may have a visa issue, they’re not allowed to work...But they are very skilled in their own way”
- “There is a lack of job opportunities...we all have the skills...we have time management, whatever, organising the family...I do understand that most of the companies want you to have experience...but what if your entire job experience has been looking after your kids?”
- “...I think there could be an event...promote these women in their community, some kind of event where they showcase their skills”

In addition to employment, women discussed the local economy in Dundee, showing pride in recent developments. They brought attention to the V&A museum, believing that this had had a positive impact on the city centre, bringing a wide range of visitors to the area. Data reveals that there have been 1.7 million visits to the museum since opening, including 500,000 people who had never been to Dundee before, and has generated approximately £109 million for the city²⁷. Further investment has also been confirmed in Dundee, with the Eden Project committing to reconfiguring a former gasworks into a hub for green tourism²⁸. Despite these positive changes, women believed that the city centre had experienced obvious decline in recent years, with the influence of online shopping and the Covid-19 pandemic hampering profitability for shops. They stated that they would like business rent rates to be lowered in the hope of encouraging new organisations to the area, explaining that through the maintenance of the high street, the general populace was more likely to thrive.

- “I mean yeah, we have the V&A museum, we have the Eden Project coming, there is obviously a reason why they’ve picked us.”
- “...the centre is just getting emptier and emptier, and so no-one is going to come, I mean we have the V&A...but you need to have a busy, interesting place in the middle of it all.”
- “If they brought the rates down, you might get more of these wee shops and keep them.”
- “If you’ve got a vibrant town centre, then young people come and stay, and spend their money, put things back into the economy”

²⁷ Visit Scotland. (2023). V&A Dundee: Economic Impact for the City. Available at: <https://www.visitscotland.org/news/2023/va-dundee-economic-impact>

²⁸ Eden Project. (2023). Eden Project Dundee, UK. Available at: <https://www.edenproject.com/new-edens/eden-project-dundee-uk>

Conclusion

Throughout discussions in Dundee, there was an obvious sense of pride in being a Dundonian. The working-class roots of the city contributed to a strong sense of community, while new developments positioned Dundee as a cultural and educational hub. However, despite community and innovation benefiting locals in many ways, the lack of some vital public services has hampered women's ability to live healthy and fulfilling lives. There are clear gaps in primary care, with women struggling to access GP and dental appointments, while those requiring gynaecological and maternity care are witnessing a service in decline. Education provision faces significant risk, due to a reduction in teaching staff, placing further burden on remaining teachers and additional support workers. Additionally, rising private rents and limited marketable properties, prevents women from benefiting from safe and affordable housing. This closely links with the decrease in the quality of employment available, contributing to expanding poverty across the city. Therefore, we have made the following eight key recommendations, which we believe align with the wants and needs of women in Dundee.

10 Key Recommendations

1. Reduce the usage of telephone appointments across GP practices.
2. Consult with cervical screening patients and medical professionals to understand the viability of self-insertion of speculums in gynaecological treatment.
3. Thoroughly monitor the impact of reducing NHS dental treatment codes, with particular focus on household finances.
4. Commit to increasing teacher and additional support staff numbers, reversing reduction plans.
5. Actively tackle misogyny in educational establishments to enable young women a wider range of career options.
6. Consult with a range of women in Dundee regarding changes to streetlighting to understand the lived impact.
7. Increase the variety of housing options available, through the development of social housing across Dundee.
8. Study alternative approaches to poverty data collection methods, moving away from the usage of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).
9. Assess the possibility of pausing student loans during maternity leave, to prevent the continued financial disadvantage of women.
10. Improve volunteer and employment opportunities for refugee and migrant women in Dundee, focusing on reskilling and the exchanging of knowledge between communities.

Thank You!

Thank you to the women and local representatives who joined us in Dundee to provide their lived experiences and views. Our work would be impossible without the continued support of women, and we are forever impressed by the strong roles women carry out across their communities.



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

Email - info@scottishwomensconvention.org

Telephone - 0141 339 4797

Website – www.scottishwomensconvention.org

Facebook, X & Instagram - @SWCwomen



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

INSPIRING SCOTLAND



Scottish Women's Convention is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Registered in Scotland No. SC0327308. Registered office 2nd Floor, The Albany Centre, 44 Ashley Street Glasgow G3 6DS.

The Scottish Women's Convention is a Charity registered in Scotland No. SC039852.