



LOCAL SPENDING AND WOMEN'S EQUALITY

Councils elected in 2022 have a triple set of challenges to contend with. The cost of living crisis which is rapidly impacting people's lives, Covid-19 pandemic recovery which impacted many Council run services and the need for practical action on climate change.



Women have been on the frontline of the Covid-19 crisis, making up the majority of health and care workers and the majority of workers at high risk of exposure to Covid-19. But all too often in jobs that are underpaid and undervalued. Other sectors which have a predominantly female workforce, such as hospitality, were harder hit by the impact of lockdown and restrictions of social distancing, with risk of unemployment or reducing working hours remaining high. Alongside this, women faced the dilemma of whether to continue to work or to look after their children when school closures took hold and more recently when isolation has been required.

The cost of living crisis will also be gendered.

Those on the lowest incomes will be hardest hit by the cost of living crisis and women are more likely to be poor, have lower levels of savings and wealth and be less able to increase paid work than men due to caring responsibilities.

Particular groups of women will be hardest hit with poverty rates higher for Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black ethnic groups, disabled people, single parents, survivors of abuse and women with no recourse to public funds[1]. As the UK Women's Budget Group has found women are also often the shock absorbers of poverty, tending to have the main responsibility for the purchase and preparation of food for their children and families and for the management of budgets in poor households[2].

In taking practical actions on climate change there are a myriad of areas where decisions can and will have a gendered impact.

To recognise and respond to these challenges we are setting five core principles for prospective Councillors:

- 1. Hardwire gender analysis into decision making**
- 2. Recognise the gendered nature of poverty**
- 3. Build local communities that put care and wellbeing at the centre**
- 4. Embrace participation and hear from a diverse range of women**
- 5. Understand the role of revenue raising in tackling inequality**

From public transport investment, to developing active travel routes, replacing street lighting, retrofitting homes and investing in green jobs. If gender analysis is not part of the process the possibility of entrenching inequalities is high.

How Councils respond to these challenges has the opportunity to address inequalities and support a revitalisation of public services. This will only be possible if considered analysis into the differing impacts of decisions are brought into the policy making process.

Alongside this we recognise the importance of all levels of Government in the UK working together to address these challenges. Within Scotland this includes ensuring adequate funding to Local Government to deliver quality services.

Women and girls have a disproportionate reliance on local government services because they do most of the unpaid child/care work and therefore rely on local services to support themselves and their families[3]. Decisions made about locally run public services will therefore have a disproportionate impact on women, with disabled women, carers, women from ethnic minority communities and low paid women likely to feel the biggest impacts.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Hardwire gender analysis into decision making

- Leadership is crucial to good practice on equalities and to embed good practice across the local authority – this means finding out about inequalities in your area, what data is and is not available, be aware of the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) process and how it

contributes to decision making and asking questions of the EQIA information that is presented;

- Attend training on equalities and gender budgeting and ensure key officers within the Council have had training;
- Ensure EQIAs are completed ahead of decisions being made and that they are part of any process rather than something carried out at the end.

2. Recognise the gendered nature of poverty

- Ensure a dignity and human rights-based approach is applied to delivery of the Scottish Welfare Fund, providing clear information, delivering decisions quickly and spending full allocation;
- Mitigate the impact of the UK policy of No Recourse to Public Funds and ensure that those in need have access to emergency support and protection from destitution;
- Champion fair work principles and measures to tackle in-work poverty including, improving quality of work for local authority employees, introducing greater conditionality for companies from whom local authorities procure services with requirements for them to increase the quality of work they offer including improving the support they provide to those with caring responsibility, enabling flexible working and addressing low pay;
- Better integrate gender equality and women's experiences of employment into labour market and economic development policymaking;

- Build gender analysis into the roll out of programmes such as energy efficiency measures in housing and in improvements to public transport provision.

3. Build local communities that put care and wellbeing at the centre

- Return care services, including respite services, that were cut during the pandemic and continue or restart assessment processes to ensure people are receiving adequate levels of support;
- Embed a human rights approach in how social care services are developed and delivered and ensure disabled people and disabled people's organisations are involved in design of services[4];
- Design childcare services that recognise the needs of women in paid employment, including ensuring local delivery of the 1140 hours is sufficiently flexible to meet parents' needs, developing or returning wrap around care services, ensuring parents of disabled children have access to affordable and appropriate childcare and working on expansion of childcare to one and two-year-olds;
- Recognise the role of investment in social infrastructure, care services, in local economic development planning;
- Ensure fair work principles are met in provisioning of care services within the local authority.

4. Embrace participation and hear from a diverse range of women

- Co-design policy and services with people who use the services or would potentially use the services, understand how decisions will impact individuals lives and ensure resources are available to support meaningful participation;
- Work with local community organisations to engage local people and reach groups whose voices may be heard less often;
- Publish clear and easily accessible information on annual Council budgets including an explanatory note on the reasons behind budget decisions.

5. Understand the role of revenue raising in tackling inequality

- Ensure EQIAs are conducted on revenue raising proposals and ask questions to explore if the outcome is expected to be gender neutral;
- Engage service users in discussion on changing service charges.

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WHAT WE HEARD FROM WOMEN

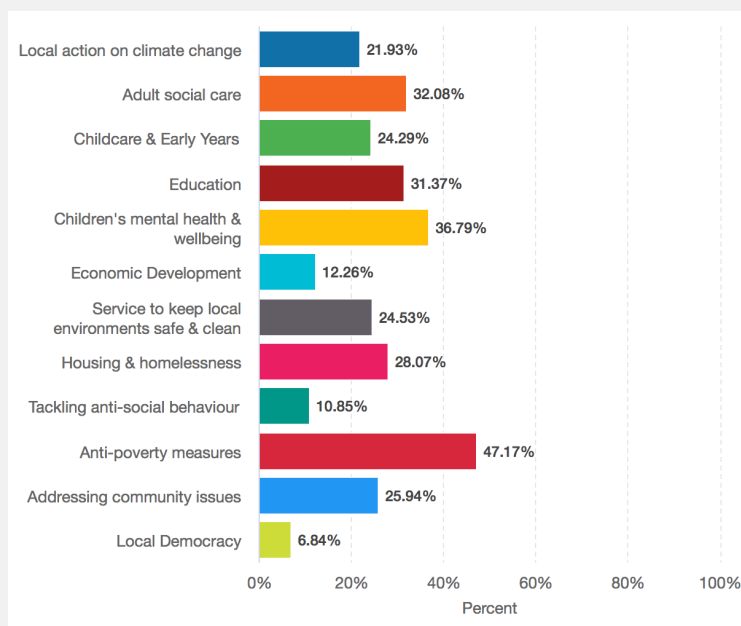
In February to March this year the Scottish Women's Budget Group asked women about their experiences and priorities for local action and public spending. 425 women from across all local authority areas in Scotland responded to the survey and shared their experiences and views on priorities for local government.

The survey demonstrated that the rising cost of living was already having an impact and women are having to make difficult decisions on heating, eating, transport and more. 32% of those who responded said they were unable to manage energy costs before the latest increase on 1 April, and concern about future rises in energy bills was already impacting on people's household spending.

"My husband is disabled, and has been shielding. Our heating costs are higher because he is largely confined to the house, and we will have to cut back on other day to day spend to manage this."

"I have no savings left, no chance to find a better paid job due to my caring role. As people go back to the office, this further reduces the jobs open to me due to the continued high prevalence of Covid which restricts our lives. "

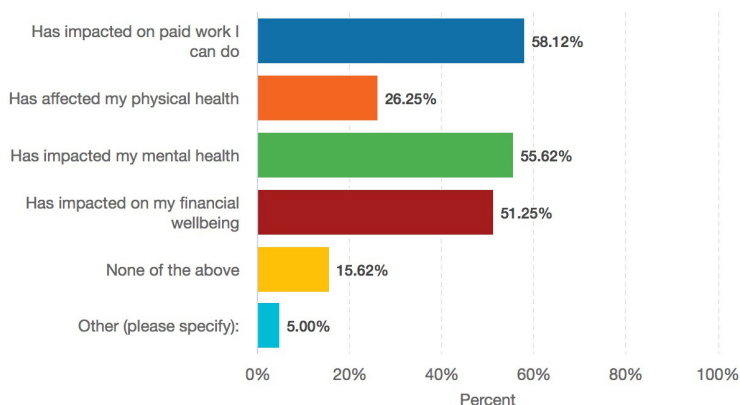
Of those who responded the biggest priority for local action was delivering anti-poverty measures. In addition to this the experiences of different women participating in the survey highlighted the need to invest in care, both adult social care and childcare to support women, the need for investment in children's mental health and wellbeing and education and the importance of housing and homelessness services. The graph below outlines women's priorities for public action.



When asked specifically about experiences of childcare 190 respondents shared some of their experiences. When asked about changes to paid work arrangements due to childcare, 25% of respondents had reduced hours and close to 12% had given up paid employment. Of course, for some this will have been a positive proactive choice but for the 160 respondents who responded to the question about the impact managing childcare has on them the results were stark, as outlined in the graph below.

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Has managing childcare (i.e. finding it, paying for it) had any impact on you?



The reported impact on women's mental and physical health alongside financial and paid work employment gives an idea of the pressure some women face trying to manage care.

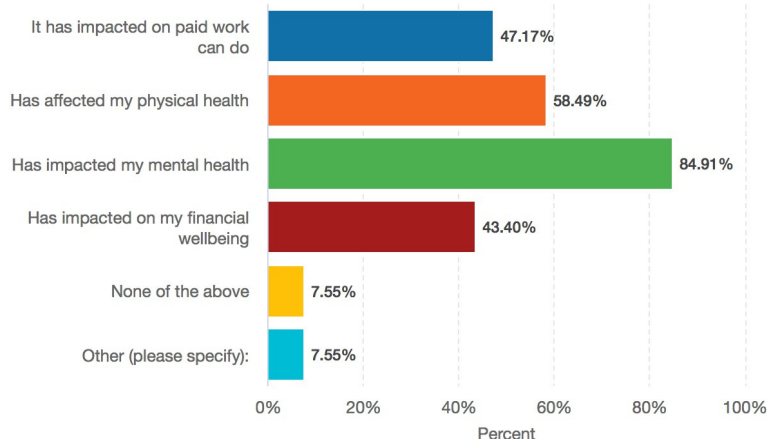
I HAVE ALREADY HAD TO CHANGE JOB ONCE DUE TO CHILDCARE ISSUES AND I AM NOW GOING TO HAVE TO CHANGE JOBS AGAIN DUE TO CHILDCARE. IT IS VERY STRESSFUL, IMPACTING ON MY EMOTIONAL WELLBEING, MY STRESS, MY GENERAL HEALTH, MY JOB PROSPECTS AS SINCE I HAVE HAD A CHILD I CANNOT STAY ANYWHERE LONG ENOUGH TO PROGRESS AND THEREFORE ALSO MY SELF ESTEEM.

I HAVE STRUGGLED TO FIND WORK DUE TO BE UNABLE TO AFFORD PRIVATE CHILDCARE AND THE FUNDED CHILDCARE AVAILABLE TO ME NOT BEING FLEXIBLE AND EMPLOYERS EXPECTING PEOPLE TO BE FULLY FLEXIBLE AND WORK DIFFERENT HOURS EACH WEEK

It was a similar case for those who used adult social care services or who supported someone who did. The impact of managing care on both mental and physical health was even more sobering. The following graph demonstrates the responses.

This will lead to real costs for people in terms of being able to live their lives fully.

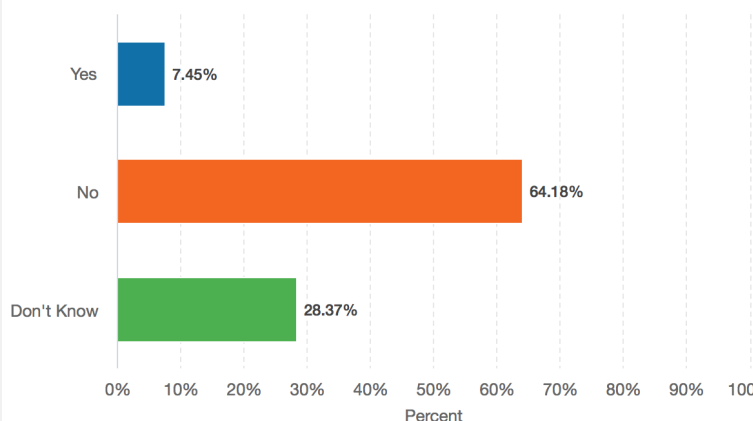
Has managing care had any impact on you: (choose all that apply)



The impact of managing care (both childcare and adult social care) has been taking its toll on women who responded to our survey. This highlights the importance of having care systems that work for women within local authorities. There is a need to redistribute care not just between women and men but between family and the state, local government has a key role to play in this.

Despite this when asked if they thought impacts on women are considered when decisions are taken in their local council area 64% said no.

Do you feel that the impacts on women are taken into account when decisions are taken by your local council?



The economic and social impacts of Covid-19 risk setting back women's equality by decades[5]. As we recover from the pandemic and face the cost of living crisis the role of local authorities and the public spending decisions they make is crucial to tackling inequality. In order to do this SWBG have 5 principles for prospective Councillors to build more equal communities.

1. **Hardwire gender analysis into decision making**

Women and men continue to experience inequalities in pay, in employment and promotion opportunities, in the way they make use of public spaces, and in the harassment and abuse they experience, with women being more likely to experience poverty at all points in their life. Women still tend to have more responsibility for unpaid work including childcare, care for older or disabled people, and domestic work. For many women, this means a greater reliance on public services and can limit the time they have for paid work and other activities. It also means that when public services are withdrawn, or social security spending is reduced, women are worst affected.

To address these systemic inequities, spending commitments on policy and programmes must be designed with the help of an intersectional gender analysis that can ensure initiatives respond to the different lived experiences. Failure to incorporate a gendered perspective on local government spending decisions risks baking inequality into the system.

The principal aim of gender budgeting is to integrate intersectional gender analysis into economic policy at all levels of government. Through this process raising awareness of different impacts on women and men of publicly funded policies and programmes and challenging the assumption that budgets are 'gender blind'[6]

Intersectional gender analysis considers the lived realities of women and men in their diversity. While 'lived realities' is meant to recognise differences between women and men, the addition of 'in their diversity' recognises how other characteristics such as age, socioeconomic situation, disability, race, ethnicity, religion and rural or urban location can also affect women and men in their lived realities[7].

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNCILLORS

- Leadership is crucial to good practice on equalities and to embed good practice across the local authority – this means finding out about inequalities in your area, what data is and is not available, be aware of the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) process and how it contributes to decision making and asking questions of the EQIA information that is presented;
- Attend training on equalities and gender budgeting and ensure key officers within the Council have had training;

- Ensure EQIAs are completed ahead of decisions being made and that they are part of any process rather than something carried out at the end.

2. Recognise the gendered nature of poverty

Tackling poverty must be the endeavour of government at all levels across the UK. Within the remit of local government there are some clear actions to take, retrofitting homes to reduce energy costs; investing in public transport; investing in social housing, investing in social infrastructure and delivering fair work would all be steps that could ease the challenges being faced by families.

Understanding the gendered nature of poverty and other population groups more likely to experience poverty is crucial to targeting actions and public spending to those in need. Women's experiences of poverty are linked to their experiences of employment and unpaid caring responsibilities which can mean women have less time for paid work and on average are more likely to rely on social security[8]. Compared with White women, Black, Asian and minority ethnic women earn less, are less likely to be in paid work[9] and more likely to be living in poverty[10], demonstrating the importance of an intersectional analysis of measures to tackle poverty.

Responding to the gendered nature of poverty does not always mean more money but can be about how services are delivered, where user costs might exist as a barrier, how changes to

implementation can improve uptake, how prioritisation to key groups for roll out of programmes such as retrofitting homes can impact women and men and different groups of women differently. We support the calls from the End Child Poverty coalition[11], women's poverty and child poverty are intertwined and tackling women's poverty is a vital component for Scotland to meet its ambitions on tackling child poverty.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNCILLORS

- Ensure a dignity and human rights-based approach is applied to delivery of the Scottish Welfare Fund, providing clear information, delivering decisions quickly and spending full allocation;
- Mitigate the impact of the UK policy of No Recourse to Public Funds and ensure that those in need have access to emergency support and protection from destitution;
- Champion fair work principles and measures to tackle in-work poverty including, improving quality of work for local authority employees, introducing greater conditionality for companies from whom local authorities procure services with requirements for them to increase the quality of work they offer including improving the support they provide to those with caring responsibility, enabling flexible working and addressing low pay;
- Better integrate gender equality and women's experiences of employment into labour market and economic

development policymaking;

- Build gender analysis into the roll out of programmes such as energy efficiency measures in housing and in improvements to public transport provision.

3. Build local communities that put care and wellbeing at the centre

Care is the backbone of society[12]. Yet, because it is overwhelmingly carried out by women, it is undervalued and has suffered from chronic underinvestment. This lack of investment must be recognised as both a cause and consequence of an unequal society. The women who are working in the care economy have been underpaid and under-protected, and marginalised women, including poor and migrant women are over-represented in this low-paid work[13]. In turn society's reliance on unpaid care has an economic impact on women, limiting paid work opportunities. There are 1.1million unpaid carers in Scotland according to Carers Scotland, 61% of whom are women[14]. A Carers Scotland survey found that 71% of unpaid carers have not had a break from their caring roles during the pandemic[15].

How care services are delivered locally makes a huge difference to those in receipt of care and those supporting others with unpaid care. Councillors have an important role to play in reviewing decisions, the impact of budget planning and the how services are delivered to build communities that put care at the centre.

"As an unpaid carer for 2 clinically vulnerable adults, neither of whom lives with me, the cost of travel to and from each of their homes throughout the day/night, 7 days a week is causing me financial hardship. I have to take the increased cost of travel out of my food and energy budget and as such, have been unable to put my heating on this winter and I am living on cheap, nutritionally empty food in order to get by. I am on my knees and my physical and mental health are suffering."

Action on childcare is critical for a gender-equal recovery. Through the Covid-19 crisis, women are twice as likely as men to have to take unpaid leave due to school closures or having to self-isolate with children[16]. Prior to the crisis the high cost of childcare meant that 25% of parents living in absolute poverty in Scotland had given up work, a third had turned down a job, a further 25% of parents had not been able to take up education or training[17]. At local authority level considering how currently funded commitments to childcare are delivered in terms of access to provision, hours in the day that council run childcare can be accessed, opportunities for wrap around care for primary aged children are all crucial considerations.

"It is very hard for a single mother to try to find work when there is no space in breakfast Club or clubs after school... struggling to find a job from 9.30am to 2pm Monday to Thursday"

Across both adult social care and childcare, investment in the workforce is a key element within these highly gendered sectors, including investing in fair wages and delivering fair work principles including access to decent sick pay, paid breaks, and unsocial hours payment. We will continue to advocate for adequate funding for care across all levels of Government in Scotland.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCILLORS

- Return care services, including respite services, that were cut during the pandemic and continue or restart assessment processes to ensure people are receiving adequate levels of support;
- Embed a human rights approach in how social care services are developed and delivered and ensure disabled people and disabled people's organisations are involved in design of services[18];
- Design childcare services the recognise the needs of women in paid employment, including ensuring local delivery of the 1140 hours is sufficiently flexible to meet parents' needs, developing or returning wrap around care services, ensuring parents of disabled children have access to affordable and appropriate childcare and working on expansion of childcare to one and two-year-olds;
- Recognise the role of investment in social infrastructure, care services, in local economic development planning;

- Ensure fair work principles are met in provisioning of care services within the local authority.

4. Embrace participation and hear from a diverse range of women

What works in one local area will not necessarily fit in another so the principle of participation in forming plans that will work for local communities is key.

Ensuring that the voices of those who may not be heard through formal structures, such as community councils, is also crucial and particularly seeking to hear from disabled women, women from ethnic minority communities, carers and low-income women.

An important tenant of gender budgeting is that people are able to participate in the spending decisions that affect their lives. Local Government offers a perfect opportunity to engage with important decisions impacting on individuals daily lives.

This goes beyond participatory budgeting schemes which have a particular role for part of the budget but looks to hear from those with experience of using services or who are unable to access services in their current format. Meaningful opportunity to participate needs to be effectively resourced and supported.

For example, in our survey women highlighted aspects of community services which impact on their lives, their feeling of safety in communities and their



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ability to get out in communities. Engaging with women, particularly women with additional protected characteristics would identify challenges they may be experiencing within the local community that might not otherwise be identified.

"I don't walk in poorly lit areas in the evening anymore."

"Roads and pavements not maintained and flyparking not addressed which causes difficulties for those with disabilities as streets can become difficult/impossible to navigate for those in wheelchairs.."

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCILLORS

- Co-design policy and services with people who use the services or would potentially use the services, understand how decisions will impact individuals lives and ensure resources are available to support meaningful participation;

- Work with local community organisations to engage local people and reach groups whose voices may be heard less often;
- Publish clear and easily accessible information on annual Council budgets including an explanatory note on the reasons behind budget decisions.

5. Understand the role of revenue raising in tackling inequality

How our revenue is generated has an important role to play in tackling inequality. Just like decisions on how best to spend public money, decisions about how best to raise public funds through tax or service charges can affect women and men differently. Understanding these effects and analysis is needed in decision making to avoid unintended consequences

For example, adding charges to services such as Homeless Storage facilities will impact women and men differently due to their different experiences of homelessness. With women more likely to be homeless when fleeing domestic abuse and have more belongings that require short-term storage while they await long-term housing solutions. Another example, is raising service charges to attend day care services. Increasing costs could become a barrier to individuals and cause them to drop out of the service, this is likely to increase the need for unpaid care, the majority of which is carried out by women.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCILLORS

- Ensure EQIAs are conducted on revenue raising proposals and ask questions to explore if the outcome is expected to be gender neutral;
- Engage service users in discussion on changing service charges.

For further information contact info@swbg.org.uk

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