

# Gender Mainstreaming in Municipal Governance



 Glasgow, Scotland (UK)

Planning

Pilot Projects

## Introduction

Glasgow, Scotland's largest city, has a rich industrial heritage and a dynamic contemporary culture. As a historic hub of commerce, education, and design, Glasgow today is also increasingly recognised for its ambitious urban regeneration initiatives and commitment to inclusive urban policy. Within the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Scottish national policy (notably NPF4), the city has begun to reshape its approach to urban governance, aiming to create a more equitable and liveable city for all residents. A key part of this effort is its emerging work in gender mainstreaming through the "Feminist City" initiative, a project focused on embedding a gender-sensitive approach in planning, transport, and city governance.

## [ Problem Statement ]

Historically, Glasgow, like most cities, was designed through a male-centric urban design that has led to planning oversights that fail to account for the specific needs and lived experiences of women. For instance, public spaces have often been developed without considering women's safety, accessibility, or mobility patterns. Parks, transport routes, and lighting infrastructures are all examples where a lack of gender consideration can lead to exclusion or harm.

As Lindsey Pratt, one of the Spatial Strategy and Projects managers in Glasgow planning department, states in the interview conducted with her: "*The main issues... we all know about for cities... they were designed by men for men. And it's trying to break that down into different parts*" Before the initiative, urban planning decisions in Glasgow lacked frameworks to consistently include gender-disaggregated data or women's voices. Engagement strategies often failed to capture the perspectives of women, especially those from marginalised communities. There was also no coherent internal strategy or public communication around gender inclusion in the built environment.

## [ Implementation and Actions ]

In October 2022, Glasgow City Council passed a motion calling for a feminist approach to town planning. This signalled a political commitment to gender equity and sparked the formation of an internal working group, primarily led by the planning department but involving departments across neighbourhoods, regeneration, sustainability, transport and housing.

The internal team began by auditing existing engagement practices and identifying gaps. They introduced new gender-sensitive methodologies, such as:

- Disaggregated data collection across age, gender, and identity;
- A place efficiency assessment involving schoolgirls to understand what makes play spaces safe and welcoming;

- Pilot projects like improved lighting in parks to enhance safety without harming biodiversity;
- Use of the Scottish Government's Place Standard Tool with a gendered lens.

The team also focused on public engagement innovations. For example: "*We've had groups take out a trolley, a barrel, a wheelbarrow, push it around the streets and ask people to join them and comment*". Externally, a cross-party political working group was established, including representatives from the Scottish National Party, Labour, and the Greens. Their broader remit spans education and tackling violence against women, but they have provided critical support to the urban planning team. To fund these efforts, Glasgow City Council allocated £500,000 (575,000€) in 2023, and a further £500,000 (575,000€) for 2024. These funds were used to augment existing infrastructure projects with gender-sensitive features, develop a strategy document, provide the commission with guidance and training, and pilot projects with tangible impact.

Although still in early stages, the city is developing indicators to assess improvements in safety, accessibility, and user satisfaction, particularly from women. Glasgow has also drawn inspiration from other cities, such as Vienna and London, to shape its evolving approach. Vienna's advice to '*show something on the ground*' led to small but impactful pilot projects. London Legacy Development Corporation's gender-inclusive planning guides have also been influential.

### [ Lessons Learned ]

1. **Strategy is Essential:** Glasgow's team recognised that a lack of an overarching strategy initially hampered internal communication and public understanding: "*In the absence of a strategy, it's very difficult to explain... We're not 100% clear yet ourselves in what we're doing.*" Having a clear strategic framework not only enhances coherence but also unlocks future funding opportunities and supports long-term visioning.
2. **Engagement Must Evolve:** Standard consultation methods often overlook women's voices. Novel, on-the-ground engagement techniques, like mobile feedback stations and targeted school workshops, proved effective at uncovering needs.
3. **Political and Managerial Buy-in Matters:** High-level support from elected officials and department heads was crucial for securing resources and institutional legitimacy: "*The support we've received from management leadership, from elected members, has been good, and that has allowed us to grow.*"
4. **Pilot Projects Build Credibility:** Demonstrating real-world improvements through small pilot interventions like lighting improvements in public space made the abstract concept of a feminist city more tangible and defensible.
5. **Peer Learning Is Valuable:** Networking with cities like Vienna, London, and Edinburgh helped Glasgow adapt proven strategies to its local context, reducing trial-and-error costs.

### [ Key Takeaways ]

- Gender mainstreaming must be embedded in governance structures, not treated as a stand-alone project.
- Data is critical: without disaggregated data, needs remain invisible.
- Inclusive engagement requires creativity and persistence.

- Pilot projects can pave the way for systemic change.
- Cross-sector collaboration is vital: Urban design must consider transport, housing, and public safety holistically.

*“It’s promoting a gender-sensitive approach in our strategies, policies, plans, and decision-making... to help create an environment that’s responsive to the different needs and lived experiences of women, and a city that’s liveable for everyone”*

Lindsay Pratt  
Spatial Strategy and Projects manager in Glasgow  
planning department

[+] Learn more about this Project

- + Glasgow City Council “Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report”:  
<https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/article/1326/Equality-Outcomes-and-Mainstreaming-Report>
- + Glasgow Planning for Womenthology “Good Design for Women is Good Design for Everyone.”:  
<https://www.womanthology.co.uk/feminist-urbanism-in-glasgow-good-design-for-women-is-good-design-for-everybody>