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Health, Social Care and Sport Committee  
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22 February 2022

Dear Convener,

Thank you for your letter of 10 February which requested further information following my joint appearance with the Minister for Children and Young People before the Committee on 8 February.

Please see my response to each of the Committee's queries below:

### **Child poverty priority groups: Examples of targeted measures**

The Committee requested examples of interventions targeted at six child poverty priority groups and the impact these have had. An overview of the Access to Childcare Fund (ACF) and the Connecting Scotland programme are provided below. More detailed information on the impact ACF is having is provided in Annex A, and the Connecting Scotland impact report can be accessed via the link provided.

#### *Access to Childcare Fund*

In 2020, the Scottish Government created a new Access to Childcare Fund, worth £3 million across 2020-22 to test new models of school age childcare that will be accessible and affordable for low income families. The fund aims to support projects to deliver a range of activities, childcare, food and family support for children, including those from the six priority family types identified in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

Projects have been exploring new models of school age childcare, including holiday provision, flexible delivery, specialist services for children with additional support needs, and increasing access to families most likely to be living in poverty. Grants are provided to establish and test new models of delivery of out of school care in order to make services more accessible and affordable for low income families.

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As of September 2021 the services reported supporting 703 families, including 689 from the six priority family types and 14 experiencing crisis. Two of the projects work solely with children with additional support needs and their families, and their reporting demonstrates how much value the parents or carers put on these services.

*“Families have reported that this service has made a massive difference to their children’s and their lives. They have stated that there is no other organisation that can cater for their children’s support needs. The clubs are allowing them to continue to work or look after their other children whilst their child attends the club. One mum has started a course at the local college to re-skill with a view of earning more in the future.”* - Support Help and Integration in Perthshire (SHIP), Perth and Kinross

Organisations funded through this route will be able to access ongoing support and mentoring to ensure the success of the project and the sharing of ongoing learning with government and others delivering school-age child care. The evaluation of these projects will help to shape our final strategic framework on out of school care. A full evaluation report will be published in May.

### *Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment / Best Start Foods*

As you know, Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods are key elements of our five family benefits which currently provide up to £5,300 for a families first child across the early years. The Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payments and increased value Best Start Foods in the first year of a child’s life focuses increased support for families with a child aged under one. Pregnancy and Baby payment is also particularly impactful for large families, whose third and subsequent children would receive nothing under the UK’s Sure Start Maternity Grant.

From launch to 30 November 2021 we awarded £22.3 million for Pregnancy and Baby Payment – providing much needed financial support to families with a new baby – part of the total £76.6 million awarded through Best Start Grants and Best Start Foods over this time.

### *Connecting Scotland*

The Connecting Scotland programme – which was set up as part of the Scottish Government’s emergency Covid response and provides devices, connections and training and support to those who are digitally excluded – recently reached the milestone of bringing 60,000 people online since programme launch.

Initially aimed at just 9,000 people who were shielding as a result of the pandemic, the programme has grown significantly over the last two years and is now one of the most comprehensive national programmes aimed tackling digital exclusion in the world, unmatched elsewhere in the UK. Over 17,000 families with children, 4,000 young care leavers and 1,500 other vulnerabilities (other family types such as kinship Carer’s) were awarded devices during Phase 2 of the programme

Work is now underway to scope an extension to the service in line with the commitment in this year’s Programme for Government to bring up to 300,000 people online by the end of

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this Parliament. For further information, you may be interested in our impact report [Connecting Scotland - A Year in View](#).

### **Discussions with retailers regarding the removal of value ranges from food stores and the impact on affordability of food**

As the Committee is aware the cost of living crisis is a concern and it is clear that food price inflation is a major issue for consumers and retailers alike; that cost pressure is being felt right across the supply chain. The increasing costs in energy, diesel, the shortages in labour across the supply chain, the increased costs of bringing goods into the country and transport have all added to cost pressures.

I can assure the Committee that there is regular and on-going dialogue with the retailers. Scottish Government and Food Standards Scotland officials meet with retailers fortnightly. In discussions with retailers they have all given the same message: they will do what they can to keep costs down, but given the size and scale of the inflationary pressures they are not in a position to absorb all of the costs. The retailers in are committed to continuing to extend their value range and doing what they can to protect costs or minimise cost increases. That said, while they have assured us they will do whatever they can to protect these prices, food price inflation is significant across the food supply chain and it looks like it will continue to be so.

The Scottish Grocers' Federation has spoken to a selection of wholesalers and overall comments are that there is no intention of discontinuing the value ranges that are available in convenience stores. One common issue is that availability is still a huge barrier at the moment and due to this some lines may not always be available, and retailers will fill the shelves with whatever products are accessible at the time.

The Scottish Government will continue to have regular discussion with the retailers to ensure we remain focused on the cost of living impact. However, the Scottish Government has limited levers in this regard and, as such, the Committee may wish to hear directly from retailers on this matter.

### **Budget**

During the evidence session I referenced that Scottish Government investment focused on supporting low income households reached almost £2.5 billion in 2020-21, of which nearly £1 billion was specifically focused on families with children. A breakdown of our spend on tackling child poverty in 2020/21 by portfolio is provided in **Annex A**. An update in respect of 2021/22 will be made available in our fourth annual Tackling Child Poverty progress report, to be published by the end of June this year. It is not possible to produce this analysis until final spend is confirmed.

A table highlighting key policies and actions to tackle child poverty as detailed in the 2022/23 Budget, broken down by Government portfolio, is also set out at **Annex A**.

Further detail on financial resources committed to tackle child poverty will be set out within the forthcoming Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, to be published by the end of March 2022.

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## **Updated information on support for young carers**

The Scottish Government absolutely values the support provided by Scotland's young carers. Young carers are dealing with pressures that are already great, and may be experiencing increased pressure at this time. This is why within the Carers (Scotland) Act the key rights outlined are also applicable to all young carers, including the right to a Young Carer Statement, which involves an outcomes based conversation about the young carer's personal circumstances and must include information about the impact of caring on their wellbeing and whether the care they provide is appropriate.

We also provide additional support to young carers such as; the Young Carer Grant, the Young Scot Young Carer Package, and the annual Young Carer festival. However, we do recognise that the transition period from young carer to being seen as an adult carer can be a difficult one to navigate and additional support at this time is required. Annex B to this letter outlines the specific support available for young carers during this transitional period.

I hope the Committee finds this information helpful to its inquiry into the Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People. I will of course write again to provide further detail on the pathfinders currently in development to understand barriers to employability for child poverty priority groups once this is available.

Yours sincerely,



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## BUDGET INFORMATION

**2020/21 estimated spend by policy and portfolio area**

The following table was published within the 2020-21 child poverty progress report and has been updated to reflect the portfolio from which resources were allocated.

As noted in the progress report, this does not include universal measures which support low income households but are not targeted – e.g. investment in Early Learning and Childcare.

Policy	Portfolio	Estimated 2020-21 spend on low income households (£m)	Estimated 2020-21 spend on children in low income households (£m)
<b>Targeted at low income households with children</b>			
Attainment Scotland Fund	Education & Skills	66.4	66.4
Pupil Equity Funding	Education & Skills	122.5	122.5
School Meals, including Free School Meals <sup>1</sup>	Education & Skills	74.7	74.7
Education Maintenance Allowance	Education & Skills	23.9	23.9
Best Start Foods / Healthy Start	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	12.3	12.3
School Clothing Grant	Education & Skills	6.0	6.0
Best Start Grant	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	17.5	17.5
STV Children's Appeal	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	1.0	1.0
Parental Employability Support Fund	Education & Skills	12.4	12.4
Innovation Fund	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	1.2	1.2
Scottish Child Payment	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	3.6	3.6
<i>Total</i>		<b>341.5</b>	<b>341.5</b>
<b>Targeted at low income households with children (additional COVID-19 funding)</b>			
Additional Free School Meals (COVID-19)	Education & Skills	56.4	56.4
COVID Winter Hardship payment <sup>2</sup>	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	14.4	14.4
COVID Spring Hardship payment <sup>3</sup>	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	17.8	17.8

<sup>1</sup> Includes funding for all school meals, including resource costs of providing paid meals

<sup>2</sup> An estimate of £400,000 in administration costs has been subtracted from total

<sup>3</sup> An estimate of £400,000 in administration costs has been subtracted from total

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Children's charities	Education & Skills	4.9	4.9
ELC clothing	Education & Skills	0.8	0.8
Vulnerable children <sup>4</sup>	Education & Skills	23.5	23.5
<i>Total</i>		<i>117.8</i>	<i>117.8</i>
<b>Targeted at low income households – not necessarily with children</b>			
Affordable Homes <sup>5</sup>	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	660.0	165.0
Council Tax Reduction - revenue foregone	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	351.0	87.8
Fuel Poverty / Energy Efficiency	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government / Net Zero, Energy & Transport	151.6	37.9
Winter Fuel Support Programme	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	3.8	1.0
Discretionary Housing Payments	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	70.6	17.7
Scottish Welfare Fund	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	35.5	8.9
Regeneration Strategy <sup>6</sup>	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	79.2	19.8
Fair Start Scotland	Education & Skills	20.9	5.2
Advice Services (Income max/financial advice)	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	4.5	1.1
Fair Food Fund <sup>7</sup>	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	2.5	0.6
Social Innovation Partnership (non-COVID-19)	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	0.8	0.2
UC Scottish Choices <sup>8</sup>	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	0.3	0.1
Money Talk Team	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	1.5	0.4
Digital Start Fund	Finance & Economy	1.0	0.3
Funeral Support Payment	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	9.2	2.3
Carer's Allowance	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	291.6	72.9
Carer's Allowance Supplement	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	38.8	9.7
<i>Total</i>		<i>1722.8</i>	<i>430.9</i>
<b>Targeted at low income households – not necessarily with</b>			

<sup>4</sup> Allocated to LAs and some third sector organisations to support services for vulnerable children and families impacted by COVID-19, including support for residential child care providers and additional social work services

<sup>5</sup> Capital spend only

<sup>6</sup> £17.5m Empowering Communities Programme (resource), £38.123 Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (capital), £5m Clyde Gateway (capital), £0.5m Clyde Gateway (resource), £18m Town Centre Fund (capital), £0.079 Business Improvement Districts

<sup>7</sup> From 2020-21 the former transformation element of the Fund was fully harmonised in to the Investing in Communities Fund, part of the Empowering Communities Programme

<sup>8</sup> This is a forecasted figure

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<b>children (additional COVID-19 funding)</b>			
Council Tax Reduction top-up	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	25.0	6.3
Scottish Welfare Fund top-up	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	22.0	5.5
Discretionary Housing Payments top-ups	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	8.0	2.0
Supporting Communities Fund	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	20.7	5.2
Wellbeing Fund	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	37.8	9.4
Communities and Third Sector Recovery Programme	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	24.7	6.2
Food Fund (national partners)	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	4.9	1.2
Food Fund (non-FSM)	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	15.0	3.8
Food and Essentials Funding	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	15.0	3.8
Financial insecurity (winter)	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	40.0	10.0
Connecting Scotland <sup>9</sup>	Finance & Economy	24.3	15.0
Coronavirus Carer's Allowance Supplement	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	19.2	4.8
Credit Union / CDFI Fund	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	15.0	3.8
Social Innovation Partnership	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	1.1	0.3
COVID restrictions/guidance funding	Health & Social Care	30.0	7.5
Fuel costs	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	3.6	0.9
Strategic food	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	0.2	0.0
Homelessness	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	5.2	1.3
Digital Participation Charter Fund	Finance & Economy	0.3	0.1
Benefit uptake marketing	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	0.3	0.1
Self-Isolation Support Grant	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	4.4	1.1
<i>Total</i>		<i>316.7</i>	<i>88.3</i>
<b>Total</b>		<b>2498.8</b>	<b>978.5</b>
of which additional COVID-19 funding		434.5	206.1

<sup>9</sup> £15 million targeted at supporting low income families with children and young care leavers through Phase 2 of Connecting Scotland, however other children will also have been positively impacted by other phases. Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)

## **2022/23 Budget**

The following table, drawn from the 2022-23 Scottish Budget, sets out investment in key policies by portfolio. This is not an exhaustive list and further detail on resources committed to tackle child poverty will be set out within the forthcoming Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

<b>Action/policy</b>	<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Budget (000s)</b>
Scottish Attainment Challenge	Education & Skills	200.0
Social Security benefits	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	3,949.2
Concessionary Fares and Bus Services	Net Zero, Energy and Transport	413.9
Discretionary Housing Payments	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	80.2
Affordable Housing	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	835.1
Whole Family Wellbeing Fund	Various	50.0
Fair Start Scotland	Education & Skills	23.6
Parental Employability Support Fund	Education & Skills	5.79
No One Left Behind	Education & Skills	15.5
Real Living Wage opportunities	Education & Skills	20.0
Free School Meals expansion	Education & Skills	72.2
Free School Meals holiday provision	Education & Skills	22.0
Wrap-around school age childcare	Education & Skills	3.0
Tackling Child Poverty Fund	Social Justice, Housing & Local Government	10.0
Cost of the school day support	Education & Skills	24.0

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## SUPPORT FOR YOUNG CARERS

### Carers Act

As noted in the main body of this letter, under the Carers (Scotland) Act every young carer has the right to a Young Carer Statement. Once a young carer reaches 18, any support detailed in their statement must remain in place until they can have their Adult Carer Support plan carried out. This allows for a smooth transitional period and ensures that any young person has continuous support. An Adult Carer Support plan serves the same purpose as a Young Carer Statement and is an opportunity for a carer to express their views and needs as an unpaid carer.

### Carers Strategy

In recognition of the incredible contribution that Scotland's unpaid carers make to our communities and know that the pandemic has added significant additional pressures. We are committed to giving a strong voice to unpaid carers, listening to their needs and acting on what they tell us.

We will develop and publish a stand-alone Carers Strategy with a focus on COVID-19 recovery and improving carer support in a meaningful and sustainable way. The strategy will focus on carers and their needs, setting out how policies across the Scottish Government can work together with other public bodies to support carers as we recover from the pandemic and beyond.

Currently we are engaging with key stakeholders on the Carers Strategy which will also focus on ensuring there is support for young carers, including how young carers are supported in their transition from young carer support to adult carer support.

### Carer Services

Many Carers benefit from support given by their local carers centre, including advice on financial maximisation and counselling services. We encourage all carers to reach out to their local carers centre to find out more on what support can be offered. Many offer dedicated Young Adult Carer Support (16-25 years old) which focuses on support for young carers during that difficult transitional phase of life.

### Carers Allowance

We have heard from carers about a lot of things they would like to change about Carer's Allowance when we introduce our new benefit, including changes to the current education restrictions, which would benefit young adult carers in particular. As it is not possible to make all of these changes at once we needed to prioritise which changes we could make.

We identified the priorities outlined in our forthcoming consultation (due for publication Thursday 24 February 2022) based on a robust Multi Criteria Analysis process. This involved working with carers, stakeholders and analysts, using evidence to assess each of the options put forward against a range of different criteria based on aims for Scottish Carer's Assistance and the social security principles. Our priorities for change are based on evidence on what will make the most difference for carers, without putting other support at risk or overcomplicating how the benefit works.

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We are making good progress on developing our new benefit and the proposals we have set out in our consultation are the result of our extensive work with carers and the organisations who support them to look at how our benefit could work better for carers in future.

### **Young Scot Young Carer Transitional Bundle**

The Scottish Government has an existing partnership with Young Scot to provide an exclusive platform for young carers with tailored discounts and opportunities. This package is available to all young carers aged 11 to 18, regardless of intensity of caring duties, and we are encouraging the promotion of this as widely as possible.

In recognition of the fact that transitioning from being considered a young carer to an adult carer can be difficult, Young Scot launched a transition bundle on 8 November 2021 to help provide some extra support. This will be available to all young carers signed up to the package until they turn 19. The bundle consists of information about rights as an adult unpaid carer as well as a £100 voucher for GiftsVouchers. Young carers can use this voucher flexibly and it can be exchanged for any voucher(s) on [GiftsVouchers](#). That means it could be used for:

- Books and study materials with a National Book Token
- Clothes for interviews or a new job from a range of fashion retailers including H&M, New Look, River Island and ASOS
- Furniture or homeware from IKEA or Homesense
- Everyday costs from supermarkets like ASDA, Tesco and Sainsbury's

The voucher can be used all at one retailer or exchanged for a combination of different gift cards.

### **Education**

It is important that young carers are identified and supported by our education community. The Scottish Government funds an Education Officer post in Carers Trust Scotland. They have been working closely with us, Education Scotland, the General Teaching Council for Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority to help ensure education staff are aware of young carers and have the understanding and resources to be able to support them appropriately.

The Education Officer has also been working with partners to ensure that during the pandemic, young carer education issues are considered in planning and guidance. This includes the launch of a [dedicated page](#) on the Education Scotland National Improvement Hub, on young carers and how they can be supported through education [during COVID-19](#).

### **Free Bus travel**

Carers are already entitled to travel for free when accompanying the person they care for, with the [National Entitlement Card](#). However, from 31 January 2022, all under 22s in Scotland are entitled to free bus travel. This opens up many opportunities for young carers and young adult carers to continue to be able to travel for free, and not necessarily have to be in the presence of the person they care for. Further information on the new free bus travel scheme can be found at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/news/free-bus-travel-for-under-22s-goes-live/>

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## **Short Breaks**

Taking a break as a carer is vital, no matter their age, in order to take care of their wellbeing. We have been working with Shared Care Scotland to expand the [Time to Live Fund](#) last year and this year. The fund provides carers, including young adult carers, with a small grant to spend on something of their choice to allow them to take a break. A break for a carer can take many forms, and the Time to Live Fund tries to support this. This might include purchasing board games, PC gaming equipment or e-readers/tablets; sports or outdoor equipment; subscriptions to movie channels, magazines; online exercise classes or music tuition.

**END**

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