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Dear Convener

Thank you for your email of 5 May following up on some of the issues raised during the kinship care session on 31 March. Please accept my apologies for the delay in replying.

Although I cannot commit to a specific timescale for delivery, I can assure you that the work of the Kinship Care Collaborative continues at pace. I mentioned during the evidence session that working groups have been set up to take forward the priorities of the Collaborative. There are three priority groups, each taking forward two pieces of work; details of which are below.

#### Priority Group 1

- Review of kinship care legislation and guidance
- Establish Clear and universal understanding of definitions within legislation

#### Priority Group 2

- Identification of resources and gaps with a view to eliminate any gaps.
- Identification of good practice.

#### Priority Group 3

- Improve consistency of Service provision across Scotland.
- Ensuring kinship care is visible within communities and promoting this

The priority groups have met a number of times, with the aim of developing their priorities into tangible change for kinship carers. They have been using driver diagrams as an improvement tool and have so far developed their primary and secondary drivers, with work on change ideas underway. Once change ideas have been developed by each group the Collaborative will then discuss and decide how the work is taken forward.

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To ensure unintended consequences are avoided, the Collaborative has agreed that the voice of people and families with care experience must be at the heart of any decisions before change is implemented.

I will write again to the Committee with a further update once the priority groups have made more progress.

I committed to sharing the 'Supporting Kinship Arrangements Protocol', which was developed by Social Work Scotland and other partners to help explain payments across local authorities. This has been attached as a separate document, and can also be found at <https://socialworkscotland.org/guidance/kinship-care-protocol/>. It is a live document that will be updated as kinship care develops. However we, and Social Work Scotland, recognise this is a very technical piece of work produced for practitioners. Social Work Scotland aims to develop accessible guidance, in due course, to accompany the document, ensuring it is easily digestible for practitioners, professionals and carers.

You will also wish to be aware that we are continuing to work with partners to implement the recommendations of the National Review of Foster and Kinship Care Allowances in order to improve consistency and transparency for children, their families and their carers across Scotland. Discussions are still ongoing with COSLA to find a way forward on the introduction of the Scottish Recommended Allowance for kinship and foster care. Again, I will provide an update to the Committee when I am able to say more on this.

With reference to the query regarding the Scottish Child Payment (SCP), I can confirm that through the 2022-23 Scottish Budget, we have brought forward the doubling of the Scottish Child Payment to £20 per week from 1 April 2022, immediately supporting around 103,000 children under the age of 6. We have accelerated delivery of this commitment by around four years for this cohort in recognition that around 60% of children in poverty live in a household with a child under the age of six – tackling child poverty head on and providing increased support for families impacted by the cost of living crisis.

Ahead of the full roll out of SCP to all eligible children under the age of 16, and the increase in the value of SCP to £25 per child per week, we will continue to provide support for school age children through Bridging Payments worth £520 in 2022. Bridging Payments, which are paid quarterly by local authorities, will reach an estimated 144,000 children this year and will have put an estimate of over £150 million in the pockets of low income families across 2021 and 2022 – delivering support almost two years ahead of full roll out of SCP. As set out in 'Best Start, Bright Futures', we will work with our partners in local authorities to ensure a smooth transition for those children receiving bridging payments, who will be eligible for SCP ahead of its full rollout.

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Beyond this support, Scottish Ministers continue to take a wide range of steps to tackle poverty and provide support to families through these challenging times. This includes through our £290 million package of cost of living measures, including a £150 payment and continued investment in our Fuel Insecurity Fund, the continuation of alternate Free School Meal provision during school holiday periods in 2022- 23 and investing up to £10 million to mitigate the UK Government Benefit Cap as fully as possible – support up to 4,000 households, 97% of which are families with children, this year.

I hope this is helpful.

*Clare Haughey*

**CLARE HAUGHEY**

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