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Dear Convener

As you will recall, on 9th November 2023 I attended the Social Justice and Social Security Committee to give evidence on Kinship Care, particularly in relation to the new Scottish Recommended Allowance for Foster and Kinship Carers (SRA).

As you know, on the 29th August 2023 the Scottish Government announced the implementation of the SRA which marked the first time a set minimum rate, which all local authorities must pay, was introduced across Scotland. Forecast to benefit over 9,000 children, the SRA was supported by an additional £16 million investment from Scottish Government in 2023/24, which saw Scotland providing foster and kinship carers with more financial support in allowances, on average, than other UK nations.

The introduction of the SRA was an example of how Scottish Government can effectively work together with COSLA as part of the Verity House Agreement to deliver on our shared priorities, including tackling child poverty and supporting those who need it most in society. The work was also supported by third sectors stakeholders, including The Fostering Network, the Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption Scotland and Social Work Scotland, demonstrating how good partnership working is helping us keep The Promise.

During my appearance at the Committee I made a commitment to ensure that the SRA was implemented across all Scottish local authorities, and that the Scottish Government would undertake a review of the implementation of the SRA. I also advised that I would review the funding implications of the SRA for 2024/25 and future years.

Eight months following my attendance at the Committee, I felt it prudent to provide the Committee with an update on the SRA, and the wider work continuing across the Government to support both kinship and foster families.

Firstly, on ensuring the implementation of the SRA. At the launch of the SRA, Scottish Government and COSLA also agreed that local authorities would publish online their allowances for foster and kinship carers, and update these on an annual basis. The purpose was to provide clarity to carers, but also to confirm implementation. Many local authorities have updated their websites accordingly, however this has not happened consistently across Scotland. In light of the partnership approach to introduce the SRA, my officials are working with Social Work Scotland to ensure that all local authorities are publishing their allowances, and that they are paying in line with, or above, the SRA.

Secondly, on the review and uprating of the SRA. Since the implementation of the SRA, the Scottish Government has been using our existing forums, networks and groups as a feedback mechanism. The response to the implementation of the SRA has been very positive from kinship and foster carers, third sector stakeholders and local authorities.

In the context of inflation, our fixed budget and the significant financial challenges that the Scottish Government faces, I have worked to ensure that the Scottish Government protects the rates of the SRA, and continues to provide the significant uplift of £16 million through the General Revenue Grant for local authorities for 2024/25. However, given unprecedented financial challenges which requires difficult decisions to be made by every area of the public sector, including Scottish Ministers, we are unable to increase in this financial year on the grounds of affordability. While this does not prevent individual local authorities from increasing their allowances, I appreciate that in the current climate this is unlikely.

Consequently, I wanted to inform you that the SRA will remain at the current rates in 2024/25. These rates remain broadly consistent with National Minimum Allowance rates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, with the SRA continuing to be the highest across the four nations for those aged 16+. This decision was discussed with COSLA and has been shared with Councillor Tony Buchanan, COSLA Spokesperson for Children and Young People.

I am also keen to ensure that any future SRA policy and financial planning is evidence based and considered in the context of how well the SRA is operating now and what improvements could be made. This is why I have asked my officials to progress an independent review of the SRA, beginning this autumn. We have made COSLA officers aware of the planned approach for the review, and have considered their comments. The review will consider the success and challenges of the SRA, and assess whether the SRA brings consistency in allowance payments and ensures that children in foster and kinship care get the support they need to thrive.



In addition to the SRA review, the Scottish Government is undertaking wider work to strengthen the practical and emotional support available to foster carers and kinship carers, and to support local authorities efforts to recruit and retain foster carers.

The Scottish Government continues to fund The Fostering Network and the Kinship Care Advice Service for Scotland to provide support for carers, including confidential support helplines. Earlier this year we published refreshed guidance on kinship care to improve consistency and practice, and over the next few months we will publish a new national assessment framework for kinship care. We also plan to publish a public consultation on the future of fostering in the autumn, which will set out our vision to radically refocus our approach to foster care to put prevention and reunification at its centre so we can accelerate the delivery of The Promise, and better meet the needs of children. This will include how we support learning and development, and address the day to day challenges in foster care.

I hope this is a helpful update and I will continue to keep the Committee informed as further work progresses.

Yours sincerely



NATALIE DON

