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Convener
Social Security Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

30 September 2020

Dear Convener,

Supporting people to self-isolate is absolutely critical to our work to control the spread of coronavirus and protect public health. Following the UK Government's announcement on 20 September to introduce a new payment to provide support for people on low incomes in England who are self-isolating, the Scottish Government has been working to develop a scheme for Scotland for those who cannot work from home and who face losing income as a result of self-isolating.

I am pleased that today I have been able to announce the initial details of our Self-Isolation Support Grant. This new financial support package will be delivered through the existing Scottish Welfare Fund which is administered by local authorities. The Scottish Welfare Fund offers an existing route to provide crisis grants to people on low incomes and is the most viable option for getting new support in place quickly. This has been agreed in partnership with CoSLA and I am grateful for the support of councils in developing and delivering the scheme.

This scheme is expected to open for applications from 12 October, and will offer a £500 Grant to eligible people on low incomes who have to self-isolate. The additional support payments will address the immediate impact of lost income and risks to wellbeing faced by people on low incomes while they are self-isolating. It is essential that we act swiftly so that people who need support are able to access it. Of course, there is further detail that we will need to develop to ensure the scheme can become operational from 12 October and deliver effective support.

In order to be eligible for the Grant, people must have been told to self-isolate through our Test and Protect Programme. People who can work from home should continue to do so, and we would expect employers to continue to pay people while they are working. This Grant is for those who will face financial hardship due to a loss of income due to needing to self-

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isolate. It will be targeted at people who are in receipt of Universal Credit or legacy benefits, with some discretion to make awards to others in financial hardship.

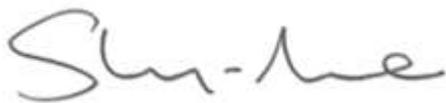
This new approach will see local authorities provide pro-active offers of support to people who are asked to self-isolate through telephone contact to establish whether any support is required for each household. While we expect that this will allow local authorities to seek information about eligibility for financial support, and encourage or support an application for it, we would also want local authorities to process applications they receive directly (e.g. if someone made an application immediately on being asked to self-isolate, before the follow-up contact).

The UK Government has announced a similar scheme in England. We await full clarity from the UK Government if we will receive additional consequential funding, but given the urgent need, we have had to make decisions on our approach in advance of an answer. This type of scheme is demand led, and it is difficult to estimate the number of people eligible for the scheme. Based on our modelling of the number of people who might be asked to self-isolated, our current estimate of costs is upwards of £11m for the remainder of this financial year. However, it is difficult to provide estimates around such an unpredictable virus and human action.

Most of the other financial support available to people who are self-isolating - Statutory Sick Pay, Universal Credit, and the furlough scheme - have been offered by the UK Government across all four nations. We have worked quickly to put in place this new scheme in Scotland once it was clear that The UK Government's new support would be introduced in England only.

This is an important step in our work to control the spread of the virus and provide support to people to self-isolate, who may be at risk of financial hardship if they do so and I look forward to sharing further aspects of the support package with you as it develops further. We want to do everything we can to support people throughout this challenging time and these payments will help ensure no-one has to choose between self-isolating and supporting themselves and their families financially.

Yours sincerely,



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