

Dear First Minister,

As a broad coalition of national organisations, community groups, academics, trade unions and faith groups who share a concern for the wellbeing of families across the country, we are writing to you today to express our grave concern. The coronavirus crisis is putting low income families under financial strain which risks long term consequences for Scotland's children.

We have all welcomed your government's commitment to ending child poverty, the leadership that you have shown in setting the 2030 child poverty targets, and the continued prioritisation of the Scottish Child Payment as a key policy supporting these ambitions. It is vital that the coronavirus crisis does not undermine these goals. That is why we have also warmly welcomed the significant support already provided by the Scottish Government in response to the crisis, including through the Wellbeing Fund and additional investment in the Scottish Welfare Fund. We have appreciated the opportunities many of us have had to engage with your Ministers and officials to help inform your government's response.

However, despite this support, and uplifts to UK benefits, families across Scotland are struggling to stay afloat. Families that were already more likely to experience poverty – such as lone parent families – are being particularly impacted, and are being pulled deeper into poverty. This is particularly true as women are more likely to be experiencing poverty, have disproportionate responsibility for caring for children and account for 91% of lone parents. Women's poverty is inextricably interlinked with child poverty.

It is clear that progress on tackling child poverty is being put at huge risk.

An out of work family with two children is still being left with an income 20% below the poverty line, a poverty line that in itself is well below the income the general public believe is needed for a minimum socially acceptable standard of living. The families that many of our organisations work with are reporting increased financial stress and associated anxiety, loneliness, and more complex mental health problems. The charitable hardship funds many of us operate have come under massively increased pressure, with, for example, a 1400% increase in demand for Aberlour's Urgent Assistance Fund.

In the face of this increased hardship our organisations continue to call for the UK Government to take action to ensure that UK social security system protects people from poverty. However, we believe that where any level of government can do more to loosen the grip of poverty than it must. We therefore believe that the time has come to build on the existing investments made by your government and the emergency provision provided by children's charities and others, and **provide a direct financial boost to all low income families**. The £10 per week Scottish Child Payment will be a vital lifeline, but will not start to be delivered until next year. Families need a lifeline now to help them weather this storm.

We call on you to use every tool at your government's disposal to deliver an emergency package of financial support to all low income families – a package we believe should amount to at least the equivalent of £10 per week per child.

Options for delivering such an emergency package that we have identified include the following:

- Using **Best Start legislation and payment systems** to introduce new or increased payments of Best Start Grants.
- Investing further in **the Scottish Welfare Fund** to provide a new coronavirus crisis grant for all low income families, whilst retaining and boosting the capacity of the existing Fund to support all those facing income crisis.

- Increasing **School Clothing Grant payments**.
- **Topping up benefits that go to families to help with the costs of raising children** - many organisations have called on the UK Government to increase child benefit, the child element of Universal Credit, and child tax credit in response to the crisis. The Scottish Government also has the powers to top up UK benefits.
- Using **local government powers** to provide payments to advance the wellbeing of children, for example under s22 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 or via financial support under the power in s20 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. These could be used to provide equivalent financial support, particularly to families with no recourse to public funds.

Additional targeted support could include:

- Increase the value of **Best Start Foods**.
- Providing a **crisis grant for families awaiting their first Universal Credit payment**.
- To support families impacted by the two-child limit, by making additional direct payments to families affected. Larger families were at increased risk of poverty even before the current COVID-19 crisis.
- To further **increase the Discretionary Housing Payment budget**, and direct local authorities to target additional funds towards those affected by the benefit cap. By increasing the DHP budget, those households impacted by the benefit cap can receive the additional support they need.

We understand that to identify the most effective delivery option, judgements will need to be made based on organisational capacity within local authorities and Social Security Scotland, and the ability to engage and work with UK agencies. It may well be that a combination of the options is needed to deliver this quickly. Whatever approach is taken the overriding priority must be to use the powers and structures available in Scotland to give an immediate cash boost to all low income families to support them through the current crisis. This will be an essential foundation on which to build the full package of financial, practical and emotional support needed to protect children's wellbeing as we transition from the crisis to recovery, in line with the principles in your government's Covid-19 Framework for Decision Making.

We are keen to work with you constructively to find practical and effective ways of achieving this, and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

SallyAnn Kelly, CEO Aberlour

Paul Carberry, Director for Scotland, Action for Children

Martin Crewe, Director, Barnardo's Scotland

John Dickie, Director of Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland

Jackie Brock, Chief Executive, Children in Scotland

Mary Glasgow, Chief Executive, Children 1st

Satwat Rehman, Chief Executive, OPFS

Jamie Livingstone, Head of Oxfam Scotland

Peter Kelly, Director, The Poverty Alliance

Claire Telfer, Head of Scotland, Save the Children

Tracey McFall, CEO, Partners in Advocacy

Dr Neil Henery, Director, Camphill Scotland

Clare Cable, Chief Executive and Nurse Director, Queen's Nursing Institute Scotland

Alistair Brown, National Director, Scottish Association of Social Work

Justina Murray, CEO, Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs

Ewan Aitken, Chief Executive, Cyrenians

Martin Dorchester, Chief Executive, Includem

Janis McDonald, Chief Officer, deafscotland

Professor Ian Welsh OBE, Chief Executive, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)

Prof Morag Treanor, Heriot-Watt University

Nancy Loucks, CEO, Families Outside

Matt Forde, National Head of Service, NSPCC Scotland

Ella Simpson, Chief Executive, EVOC

Duncan Dunlop, CEO, Who Cares? Scotland

Jimmy Wilson, CEO, FARE Scotland

Dr Anne Mullin, Chair, the Deep End Group Scotland

Craig Samuel, NAWRA representative Scotland

Jo Derrick, CEO, Staf

Dr Hayley Bennett, Social Policy Research Fellow, University of Edinburgh

Prof Adrian Sinfield, University of Edinburgh

Claire Burns, Director, CELCIS

David Thomson, Destiny Church

Dr Hartwig Pautz, Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at the University of the West of Scotland and co-lead of the UWS-Oxfam Partnership

Mike J Kirby, Scottish Secretary, UNISON

Professor Mhairi Mackenzie, Professor of Public Policy, University of Glasgow

Nick Bailey, Professor of Urban Studies, University of Glasgow

Graeme McAlister, Chief Executive, Scottish Childminding Association

Colin Flinn, Chief Executive, Royal Caledonian Education Trust

Mark O'Donnell, Chief Executive, Royal Blind

Douglas Guest, Acting Director for Scotland, Home-Start UK Scotland

Billy Watson, Chief Executive, Scottish Association for Mental Health

Alan Thornburrow, Director, Business in the Community Scotland

Juliet Harris, Director, Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

Bernard Harris, Professor of Social Policy, University of Strathclyde

Janet Haugh, Chief Executive, Ypeople

Cath Morrison, Chief Executive, The Lilius Graham Trust

Dr Mhairi Crawford, Chief Executive, LGBT Youth Scotland

Pat Rafferty, Scottish Secretary, Unite the Union

Professor Stephen Sinclair, Co-Director, Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, Glasgow Caledonian University

Professor John McKendrick, Co-Director, Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, Glasgow Caledonian University

Professor Sharon Wright, Professor of Social Policy, University of Glasgow

Hugh Foy, Director of Programmes and Partnerships, UK Region Xaverian Missionaries

Professor Chik Collins, Rector (Vice Chancellor) of the University of the Faroe Islands

Shaben Begum, Director, Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance

Dr David Walsh, Public Health Programme Manager, Glasgow Centre for Population Health

Emma Revie, Chief Executive, The Trussell Trust

Professor Steve Turner, Scottish Officer, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

Kate Wimpress, Chair, SURF – Scotland's Regeneration Forum

Angela Moohan, Chief Executive Officer, The Larder West Lothian

Nathan Sparling, Chief Executive, HIV Scotland

Neil Mathers, Chief Executive, Children's University Scotland

Steven McCluskey, Chairperson, Bikes for Refugees

Margo Uprichard, CEO, The Louise Project

Clare Simpson, Manager, Parenting across Scotland

Ron Culley, Chief Executive, Quarriers

Jane Brumpton, Chief Executive, Early Years Scotland.

Hazel Brown, Chief Executive Officer, Cornerstone

Anne F.Meikle, Convenor, Scottish Women's Budget Group

Larry Flanagan, General Secretary, EIS

Douglas Hamilton, former Chair of the Poverty and Inequality Commission

Emily Beardsmore, CEO, Light Up Learning

Virginia Radcliffe, CEO, Licketyspit

Roz Foyer, General Secretary Designate, STUC

Marie Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Cranhill Development Trust

Ian Bruce, Chief Executive, Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS)

Jacqui Hardie, Executive Strategic Manager, Fife Gingerbread

Professor Mike Danson, Chair, CBINS (Citizen's Basic Income Network Scotland)

Shona Blakeley, Executive Director, Women's Fund for Scotland

Emma Jackson, National Director Scotland, Christians Against Poverty

Sharon Colvin, CEO, 3D Drumchapel

Dr Patrick Roach, General Secretary, NASUWT

Maragret Nakityo, Secretary, Afreshe

Traci Kirkland, Head of Charity, Govan Community Project

Rachel Sutherland, Bureau Manager, East & Central Sutherland Citizens Advice Bureau

Bishop Nolan, President, Justice and Peace Scotland

Jim McCormick, Associate Director for Scotland, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Russell Gunson, Director, IPPR Scotland

Frazer Scott, CEO, Energy Action Scotland

Anna Ritchie Allan, Executive Director, Close the Gap

Tim Frew, Chief Executive, YouthLink Scotland

Shruti Jain, Chair, Saheliya

Marguerite Hunter Blair, Chief Executive, Play Scotland

Linda Tuthill, CEO, The Action Group

Rami Okasha, Chief Executive, CHAS

Irene Audain MBE, Chief Executive, Scottish Out of School Care Network

Rachel Adamson, Co-Director, Zero Tolerance

Dr Marsha Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Women's Aid

Dave Liddell, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Drugs Forum

Sharon McAulay, Project Manager, STAR Project

Danny Collins, National President, Society of St Vincent de Paul (Scotland)

Emma Ritch, Executive Director, Engender