

Dear First Minister,

Winter Support Fund 2022

We welcome the fact that you have convened the Resilience Committee to examine and review policy actions which may be adopted in a future emergency budget. We therefore write to you, as a group of organisations who support children and families, to request that the Winter Support Fund be one of those actions which will be funded by your government.

We are extremely concerned that the cost-of-living crisis has and will continue to be a catastrophe for the many children and families we support, care for and love. Unless more financial action is taken to avert this from happening, Scotland will unfortunately witness many families suffer a harrowing and alarming winter. It will have a chilling negative effect with regards to Scotland reaching our child poverty targets. As energy bills sky rocket, many families will be faced the heart-breaking choice of either feeding the energy meter or feeding their family. That is why we urge your government to plan now and prepare for winter by ensuring families can access a Winter Support Fund this year.

We welcome the Scottish Government's actions to date and the use of some of the levers to help address the cost-of-living pressures which is worth close to £3 billion, including the significant investment in the Scottish Child Payment. However, the true scale of the challenge ahead is akin to the pandemic and the level of support should match this. We believe that further investment is needed, not only by getting more money into families pockets directly through the Scottish Child Payment and doubling of the bridging payment this winter but by providing the most vulnerable families and children with access to emergency and practical support.

As you will be aware, some of our organisations offer our own emergency or crisis funds to families. These funds were designed to provide an immediate, one-off support to families faced with an unexpected expense. These funds were over prescribed last winter and that is why your government's £41m Winter Support Fund last year was such a lifeline for many families – and that need for this vital support hasn't gone away.

Indeed, as we near the end of summer we are already seeing record requests for our funds. The added benefit of the Winter Support Fund was that it let our organisations reach some families who might not have come to us for support before and ensure that these families do have money in their pockets

We agree with your recent statement which you said *'energy bills are sky-high and rising now, and with every day that passes, people become more anxious about how to pay these bills and feed their kids. Action is needed – and it must be both significant and immediate'*.

That is why we have also pushed the current UK Government and the two Prime Ministerial candidates to treat this cost of crisis as an emergency and take action to provide more money into the pockets of families. While we agree action is needed from the UK Government and we will continue to hold the UK government to account, it would also be a dereliction in our duty to Scotland's children and families if we didn't request that further action is also needed from the Scottish Government - including giving families help during the coldest months with the reintroduction of the Winter Support Fund for 2022.

We hope that you will consider this request and note our thanks and gratitude for all the work you and your government have provided to date. We welcome any further discussions on why this is desperately needed and what a difference it will make.



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