

Thank you for your letter of 10 September about Petition PE1683, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide better support for multiple birth families. You have asked me to respond to the following:

- You have asked for my views about concerns raised in the petitioner's submission to the Committee's meeting on 5 September. These concerns include a query about the modelling used for the Scottish Child Payment.
- You have asked what assessment the Scottish Government has conducted to understand the impact of having multiple births, regardless of income and what supports can be put in place.
- You have asked where the Scottish Government places families who have had multiple births on the spectrum from the most vulnerable (i.e. requiring targeted resource) to universal provision.

### **Modelling for the Scottish Child Payment**

The approach the Scottish Government took to the modelling and analysis of potential options for the Scottish Child Payment is set out fully in the *Analysis of Options for the Income Supplement* report, published on 26 June. All modelling was undertaken using the DWP's Policy Simulation Model (PSM) which works by modelling future versions of the Family Resources Survey (allowing for long-term forecasts). It then applies a model of the tax and benefit system, allowing us to model a simulation of a given policy for a given household. It does not, however, allow us to identify children from multiple births and as such, it is not possible to model the effects of a given policy on such families using the PSM.

As we have set out in previous responses to the Committee, and unlike the way other benefits (such as Child Benefit) operate, payments will be made at the same rate for every eligible child in a household, including those born in multiple births. At the same time, there will be no cap on the number of eligible children a household may claim for.

### **Support for families with multiple births**

As explained in previous submissions to the Committee, the Scottish Government prioritises support to families and individuals that are evidenced as being at a higher risk of poverty. None of the support mechanisms operating currently treat multiple births as a criterion for targeted support, and the Scottish Government has not carried out research to assess specifically the impact of multiple births. However, families with multiple births will be able to access targeted support where they meet existing eligibility criteria for individual support mechanisms, including social security payments.

We are taking a range of actions in Scotland to tackle poverty and disadvantage and have set in statute our ambition to eradicate child poverty. Our first Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan is backed by a range of investments, including the £50 million Tackling Child Poverty Fund. The plan includes a range of action to support families, focused on increasing incomes, reducing costs and mitigating the impacts of poverty. Our actions also include a focus on the six priority groups which statistics show are most likely to live in poverty. This includes larger families (with 3+ children), young mothers (<25) and households with a disabled family member.

To improve outcomes for all children, especially those experiencing poverty, we have developed a strong offer of support for families. This is summarised in the first annual progress report on child poverty, published in June.

Previous submissions to the Committee from the Scottish Government have highlighted a range of measures aimed at supporting families and children, many of which will assist in supporting families with multiple births. These include Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, Deposit Guarantee Scheme, Neonatal Expenses Fund, Milk Bank for Scotland, Baby Box, funding for early learning and childcare, funding for the Family Friendly Working Scotland Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity Discrimination Working Group, funding for the Twins and Multiple Births Association (TAMBA), the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, and funding for Home-Start UK through the Children, Families and Young People Early Intervention Fund.

I will allude to some of these measures further but I will focus here mostly on measures that have not been included in previous submissions. I hope that these, combined with those already outlined, will provide the petitioner with reassurance that the Scottish Government is committed to reducing poverty and ensuring that all families and children who need support are able to access this, whether within a multiple birth family or not.

### **Maternity and early years**

All midwifery units when dealing with the care for pregnant women follow National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines and the Keeping Childbirth Natural and Dynamic (KCND) programme. The key principles of the KCND pathway for normal maternity care is the right of pregnant women to be provided with current evidence-based information and to be involved with decisions regarding their care and that of their baby/babies.

Women who are having a multiple pregnancy or those having a singleton pregnancy, are subject to ongoing assessment, and can be referred to any pathway depending on medical and social need, support is then tailored to these needs on an individual basis. Postnatal care should be planned to ensure continuity of care/carer, with a documented, individualised care plan encompassing the mother and baby/babies. The emphasis should be on practical advice and information on pain management, signs and symptoms to look out for, infant feeding, social networks and coping strategies.

By August 2020 we will almost double the current offer for funded Early Learning and Childcare to 1140 hours for every 3 and 4 year old. The statutory eligibility criteria for early learning and childcare (ELC) funding for 2 year olds are based on evidence that suggests children experiencing the most disadvantage particularly benefit from access to high quality ELC. We understand there can be an impact on family circumstances as a result of a twin or multiple birth. However, targeting on the basis of very low or no income will pick up those children who stand to benefit most from early access to high quality ELC. As the Committee is aware, local authorities already have discretion to provide funded ELC to any child they see fit. If families feel their children would benefit from early access to funded ELC, they can contact their local authority to discuss what is available locally.

There are no plans to extend the funded entitlement to funded early learning and childcare (ELC) for two year olds who are part of a multiple birth, on the basis of this factor alone. We will evaluate the impact of the entitlement for eligible 2 year olds through Scottish Study for Early Learning and Childcare before making any further changes to the entitlement for ELC.

In addition to our universal offers of support we also provide support targeted at families on low incomes, including our Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods. Neither of which are subject to caps on the number of children supported. Although Best Start Grant is targeted at families on lower incomes, there is no income threshold for any of the qualifying benefits, meaning families both in and out of work may be eligible. We have also extended Universal Credit eligibility over 2 months because of the short award period and because awards are made in arrears. This means applicants can qualify by an award of UC in either the month of or the month before the one in which the date of application falls.

Between 10 December 2018 and 30 June 2019, a total of £12.9 million of Best Start Payments were issued. This compares to £2m which the UK Government paid out in Sure Start Maternity Grants in Scotland in 2017-18. Our published statistics show around 1% of Pregnancy and Baby payments paid to clients by 28 February were for multiple births and we are looking into publishing updated analysis of multiple births in our next BSG statistics publication in November so that these figures are available in future.

Our strong offer of universal support continues into school with all p1-p3 children benefiting from Free School Meals. This offer supports more than 134,500 children, ensuring they benefit from healthy, nutritious free school meals, delivering savings for families of around £400 per child per year.

### **Support for parenting**

The Scottish Government recognises the instrumental role third sector organisations have in supporting Scotland's families. Over the last 4 years through the Children, Young People and Families Early Intervention Fund, we have provided £58 million of third sector funding, helping thousands of children, families and communities across Scotland. Through this fund, organisations such as Relationships Scotland, One Parent Families Scotland, Home-Start and many more have received funding to promote and maintain healthy relationships for Scotland's children and their families.

In April, reinforcing our support to the third sector, we announced the new Families and Communities Fund. This fund will provide up to £16 million a year for 3 years, subject to the Spending Review, to third sector organisations. The Fund will provide a contribution to core costs of successful organisations, starting in April 2020.

We have also developed the Parent Club website. This invaluable resource provides advice and tips from parents which is backed by professionals and experts. The advice spans a wide range of topics which parents have indicated they would like support with such as sleep, healthy eating and also managing children's behaviour.

### **Support for employment**

We are taking steps to help parents to work and earn more. We have launched our devolved employability programme, Fair Start Scotland, and have now committed £22 million for new intensive parental employment support. Our Parental Employment Support Fund will launch by the end of the year, backed by £12 million of investment. This will target priority families, (Lone Parents, BME families, Families with 3 or more children, Disabled Parents, Parents under 25 years and Families with the youngest child under 1), who are evidenced to be at a higher risk of poverty.

The support will help low income parents access or progress in employment by providing key worker support that helps them develop their skills and raise their income level, lifting them

and their family out of poverty. This will be further enhanced with £6 million in new support specifically targeted at disabled parents and £4 million to support links between these programs and to help parents benefitting from funded Early Learning and Childcare. This investment will help all parents to access employment and also progress within a career.

We are committed to ensuring a fair work future for Scotland, ensuring that work is sustainable, offers decent rates of pay, good training and support, opportunities to progress, a flexible working environment and enough hours in work to provide a wage that, as a minimum, meets basic family needs. We are taking a wide range of action to achieve this goal including promoting the real Living Wage and investing in our Flexible Workforce Development Fund. More on our action here can be found in the [Fair Work Action Plan](#).

Recognising again the contribution of the third sector, we are providing funding for 2019-20 to the Family Friendly Working Scotland Partnership to support and promote the development of flexible and family friendly workplaces. We are also funding Timewise to conduct a feasibility study for a 'What Works Network for Fair Flexible Work' in Scotland. This aims to design, test, scale and embed new approaches to increasing the availability of flexible working.

We have funded the Mums Returning to Work project, which will work in partnership with a local children's nursery to produce an online training resource that informs best practice in supporting women through maternity and on their return to work. The resource, which can be found [here](#), here can then be used by other small employers, especially those who employ mostly women.

The Scottish Government's Gender Pay Gap Action Plan, A Fairer Scotland for Women, included a commitment to "fund research on the career trajectories of mothers returning to work based on longitudinal data from the Understanding Society survey".<sup>[1]</sup> The objective of the research is to "help us understand the barriers that mothers face when returning to work". This research has been completed and is due to be published before the end of the year.

Finally, we know that people don't claim all the benefits they are entitled to for a range of reasons. That is why in November 2018 we launched our Money Talk Team (MTT) service to ensure that people are receiving all the benefits they are entitled to and are not paying more than they need to for basic goods and services. The MTT (previously known as the Financial Health Check) covers 17 different components and offer personalised advice on money matters - from benefit take up and council tax reduction to debt advice and reducing household energy costs. This will help people avoid the 'poverty premium' of paying more for essential goods and services.

I trust this will provide you with further reassurance that this government is committed to ensuring that all children in Scotland get the best start in life and that we strive to provide the best possible care for all families at all stages of their journey, regardless of their circumstances.