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Item 6 (b)

22nd February 2018

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Our ref: 2017/0041485

12 December 2017

Thank you for your email of 10 November to the First Minister, the Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP, about a motion passed by Glasgow City Council which calls upon the Scottish Government to reconsider the criteria used to inform its decision to reduce welfare rights funding. I am replying because the matter falls within my Ministerial portfolio.

The UK Government's welfare cuts and austerity agenda have pushed more people into poverty. Every year we spend over £100m to help relieve the worst impact of UK Government welfare cuts and support those on low incomes but mitigating the full impact of these cuts will not be possible. We will do what we can within the powers that we have to help those who are most affected by the cuts and changes that are being imposed by the UK Government. However, this spend on mitigating the worst of UK Government welfare cuts has a direct impact on the money available to lift people out of poverty and address the causes, instead of just putting a plaster on UK Government policies. It is incredibly frustrating to be fighting just to keep people at a standing position.

I believe the "welfare rights funding" referred to in the motion relates to the Making Advice Programme which is administered by the Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB). This funding was always time limited and did not represent core funding for the organisations involved. We will continue to provide significant resource to advice services to ensure those affected by welfare reform get the advice and assistance they need.

The Scottish Government is providing around £2.28 million of funding in 2017/18 to support advice projects currently being funded through SLAB to support people affected by debt and welfare reform. We have prioritised our funding to ensure it can best meet need. It will support those areas set to receive the full service Universal Credit rollout and particularly vulnerable client groups including people with disabilities, victims of domestic abuse, low income families and people with significant debt.

We are also providing funding of £1.46m to Citizens Advice Scotland in 2017/18 for the delivery of welfare rights advice across the Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) network.

Glasgow CABx are receiving around £260,000 of the total. A further £550,000 has been invested this year in Citizens Advice Direct to continue to make free, impartial advice available to everyone in Scotland, regardless of personal circumstance.

In addition, we are implementing a range of direct actions including full mitigation of the bedroom tax and seeking to use of our administrative flexibilities in Universal Credit to allow tenants to choose whether they want their rent paid directly to their landlords or to receive fortnightly rather than monthly payments.

You may also wish to note that nine Glasgow based community projects are benefitting from £380,000 funding across 2016-18 through our £1 million a year Fair Food Fund. These projects are developing dignified services that build capacity and resilience in individuals and communities through bespoke activity designed around cooking, growing, food education, and volunteering. Additionally, we are providing £25,750 to the FareShare Glasgow and West of Scotland regional centre in 2017/18 to redistribute surplus food to third sector partners within the city and surrounding areas.

With reference to the Universal Basic Income (UBI) trials, as you will be aware, in the 2017-18 Programme for Government the Scottish Government made a commitment to provide support to the four pilot authorities in their exploration of the UBI concept. I welcome the involvement of the Glasgow City Council as one of those pilot areas, and I wrote to the Chief Executive outlining details of the £250,000 fund to support feasibility work.

ANGELA CONSTANCE