

Dear MSP,

I am writing on behalf of the **Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform (SCoWR)** to both congratulate you on your election to the fourth session of the Scottish Parliament and to draw your attention to some critical challenges that face the Parliament in relation to current Westminster led reforms to the welfare system.

By way of background the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform (SCoWR) is a coalition of over forty organisations[i] working with people experiencing exclusion and poverty across Scotland. We support the need for a reform of welfare provision to increase support for those trying to get into the labour market and protect those unable to do so. Our Manifesto (attached – hard copy available on request) sets out **five key principles for welfare reform** agreed by our diverse membership. These are that our welfare system should be adequate to protect people from poverty, should respect human rights and treat people with dignity, should be simplified, should enable everyone to participate fully in society and should take account of the different legislative and service infrastructure in place in Scotland.

We are concerned that **the current approach to welfare cuts and welfare reform fails to deliver against these principles** and have written to Scottish MPs raising our concerns. We urge you to also raise these concerns with your Westminster colleagues.

An unprecedented £18 billion of cuts is being made to benefits and tax credits, and reforms are proposed that will combine means-tested benefits and tax credits into a new universal credit and replace disability living allowance with personal independence payments. Many aspects of these cuts and reforms will have significant, and too often very negative, impacts on individuals and communities across Scotland, and on devolved housing, childcare, health, social care and anti-poverty policy.

However, there are **specific implications and challenges posed for the Scottish Parliament**. In particular, the current UK Welfare Reform Bill will:

- **Abolish council tax benefit (CTB)**, and devolve responsibility for replacement council tax rebate schemes. There will be a 10 per cent cut in expenditure with, as yet, no commitment to ring-fence budgets
- **Abolish discretionary social fund community care grants and crisis loans**, with responsibility devolved for developing locally based provision to take the place of grants and crisis loans.
- Require new criteria to be set for devolved **passported benefits** including free school meals, the energy assistance package and school clothing grants, all of which play a crucial role in supporting families across Scotland
- Require a **legislative consent motion** to enable Scottish Ministers to amend Scottish legislation to take account of proposed changes to UK benefits.

We understand that the Scottish Government intends to consult on proposed replacements for council tax benefit, community care grants and crisis loans and we will respond to and provide fuller briefing as this happens. In the meantime SCoWR would urge you to consider carefully the five principles for welfare reform outlined in the attached manifesto when considering how government in Scotland should respond to these challenges.

Specifically we would urge you to ensure that;

- Any scheme developed to replace current council tax benefit entitlement does not reduce the level of support low income households depend on and does not introduce a myriad of differing taper rates at which benefit is withdrawn that could provide further work disincentives.
- If responsibility for the replacement of social fund community care grant and crisis loans is to be devolved, a national framework is set out that protects the conditions of eligibility in law and allows for a right of independent review of adverse decisions. The level of funding for any replacement scheme must be maintained to recognise the vital support that it provides to families in need.
- The setting of new criteria to establish entitlement to passported benefits ensures that support for those in and at risk of poverty is maximised and barriers to take up minimised, with, at the very least current levels of entitlement retained.
- When considering any forthcoming legislative consent motion required to implement universal credit and replace disability living allowance with personal independence payments, the Scottish Parliament takes the opportunity to ensure fuller details are made available of the reforms and scrutinizes their impact on Scotland and their implications for devolved responsibilities before approving.

We would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss our shared concerns, and their implication for tens of thousands of Scotland's most disadvantaged citizens.

In the meantime please do not hesitate to get back to either myself on 0141 353 0440 or John Dickie, head of CPAG in Scotland, on 0141 552 3656, if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

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[i] SCoWR members include: Action for Children Scotland, Action Group, Afreshe, Archibald Foundation, Barnardos in Scotland, Bipolar Scotland, Capability Scotland, Carr-Gomm Scotland, Children 1st, Child Poverty Action Group, Choices - One Parent Families West of Scotland, Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland, Church Action on Poverty, Citizens Advice Scotland, Ecas, Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty, Energy Action Scotland, Faith in Community (Scotland), Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector, Glasgow Disability Alliance, Glasgow University Students' Representative Council, Headway UK, Hillcrest Housing Association, Inclusion Scotland, Iona Community, Leonard Cheshire Scotland, Margaret Blackwood Housing Association, Momentum, National Autistic Society, One Parent Families Scotland, Oxfam in Scotland, Poverty Alliance, Public and Commercial Services Union, Quarriers, RNID Scotland, Salvation Army, SAMH, Save the Children in Scotland, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Scottish Council for Single Homeless, Scottish Drugs Forum, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Scottish Homelessness & Employability Network, Scottish Out of School Care Association, Scottish Poverty Information Unit, Scottish Women's Convention, SCVO, Sense Scotland, Turning Point Scotland.