

## Children 1st pre-budget briefing for MSPs

Children 1st is Scotland's National Children's charity. We exist to prevent abuse and neglect, to protect children and keep them safe from harm. Together we help children in Scotland live in safe, loving families and build strong communities. We help survivors of abuse, trauma and other adversity to recover, and we work tirelessly to protect the rights of children in Scotland.

We have prepared this briefing for MSPs with some specific issues that we would like to see explored as part of the scrutiny of the Scottish Government budget for 2022-23. These policy areas reflect Children 1st's key strategic priorities which have been developed to reflect what children and their families tell us is important to them.

### Delivering Whole Family Support

The pandemic and associated restrictions (including lockdown) have impacted on every child and every family. For some families, especially those who were already experiencing trauma and adversity, it has pushed them to crisis point.

We welcomed the announcement in September's [Programme for Government 2021/22](#) for a £500m 'Whole Family Wellbeing Fund' to be used to help families overcome challenges before they reach crisis point. This reflects the recommendations made in [The Promise](#) that families need to be able to easily access early help and support. **We ask MSPs to use the budget process to clarify if this fund is new money, what proportion will be spent on enhancing the offer of crisis support and what proportion will be directed to new early help and support for families to get the help they need quickly.**

The children and families who we work alongside have told us about the difficulty they often experience in finding the right kind of support – relationship-based, non-judgemental, non-stigmatising and easily available in their community – when they have looked for it. All too often, families tell us the services and support that are available are confusing, inaccessible, siloed and disjointed. Many families feel lost between the gaps or feel 'parked' on waiting lists for inappropriate more acute services when there is no alternative.

**We ask MSPs to ensure that Whole Family Wellbeing Funding delivers the early support that children and families need.**

Family support is a right, and to help children recover from the impacts of lockdown, it needs to be a practical and accessible reality for families wherever and whenever they need it.

### Funding a Barnahus for child victims and witnesses of crime

[The Programme for Government 2021/22](#) made the welcome commitment that:

*“children in Scotland who have been victims or witnesses of abuse or violence, as well as children under the minimum age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour has caused significant harm, will have access to a “Bairns’ Hoose” by 2025”*

We applaud the ambition and the vision of transforming support for child victims and witnesses laid out by the Scottish Government. We acknowledge the long-standing support of MSPs, including previous members of the parliament's Justice Committee, for bringing European best practice for child victims and witnesses – the Scandinavian Barnahus approach – to Scotland.

Children and young people have repeatedly told us that the experience of the justice system can be as traumatic as the experiences that brought them there in the first place. They have told us that what they want is to know that justice will be done and they will get both immediate help and long-term support to recover. This requires all the services they need to be provided under one roof – in a Barnahus or 'bairnhoose' - and health, justice and children's services to work together to deliver this with the child's needs at the centre.

**We would like to see MSPs seeking clarity on budget allocation across children & families, justice and health to deliver the Barnahus vision, and detail on how this budget will be managed.**

### Tackling child poverty

Families tell us that being on a low income makes it harder to do things that support children and other family members emotionally. Children 1st's Money Advice Team works with families alongside Family Support Workers and communities to provide holistic support, working together alongside families to address the immediate financial issues they are experiencing, but also bringing our relational, non-judgemental, non-stigmatising support to other issues which can be compounded by financial stress and affect the wellbeing of children and their families.

Children 1st is a member of the [End Child Poverty coalition](#) and welcomed the recent announcement by the First Minister that this budget will include a commitment to double the Scottish Child Payment from April 2022, to £20 a week. The interim targets laid out in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 – that fewer of 18% of children are living in relative poverty – are due to be met in financial year 2023/24. [Analysis from Fraser of Allander](#) published earlier this year (*before* the £20 a week uplift to Universal Credit was withdrawn) shows that the Scottish Child Payment would need to be doubled again, to £40 a week, for these interim targets to be met.

**We would like to see MSPs scrutinising proposals to tackle child poverty beyond the commitment to double the Scottish Child Payment.**

We want to see a cash-first approach to alleviate immediate financial hardship, and actions built into the Scottish Child Poverty Action Plan which will take cognisance of the additional strain of rapidly rising food and fuel costs.

### Next steps

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