

F/T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Collette Stevenson MSP
Social Justice and Social Security Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

By email:
SJSS.committee@parliament.scot

26 November 2024

Dear Collette,

I attended a Committee session on 7 November 2024 to discuss the Funeral Expense Assistance (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2024. During the session Liz Smith MSP raised concerns about the ability of the Scottish Government to measure the impact of its policies. She cited the example of Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Poverty in Scotland 2024 report, published last month, which expressed concern that the key data source used to measure poverty rates in the UK - the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Family Resources Survey (FRS) - is failing to capture the impact of the Scottish Child Payment.

I wrote to the Committee on 22 July 2024 on the data issues discussed during the Committee mini-inquiry into Scottish Child Payment, including information on the FRS and how Scottish Government analysts are working with the DWP to ensure the survey captures the full impact of the Scottish Child Payment. On that basis I will not go into detail on these issues again at this point. However, I would like to take this opportunity to restate that the DWP's FRS is not the only tool for measuring impacts of policies. The Scottish Government's evaluation strategy for assessing the effectiveness and impact of the Scottish Child Payment includes a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence gathering and analysis (including lived experience).

The Scottish Government has a robust evaluation process in place across all of its social security benefits, and published a [report](#) in March 2024 examining outcomes associated with Social Security Scotland spending and highlighting the significant amount of detailed analytical work that underpins the design and delivery of Social Security Scotland benefits.

The interim evaluation of the Scottish Child Payment that we published in July 2022 found that it has led to more money being spent on children, including for essentials like food, family day trips, and medical items for families with disabled children. The payment has also helped people avoid debts, with some feeling they would be forced to use foodbanks without the benefit. We also published [analysis](#) of how Scottish Child Payment interacts with the labour market in July and our latest [estimates](#) of its take-up this month, showing around 9 in 10 children eligible for the payment received it in 2023-24.

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The benefits of the Scottish Child Payment have also been recognised by a wide range of stakeholders, including of course the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, whose evidence to the Committee on 30 May 2024 described the Scottish Child Payment as “incredibly effective”. This evidence also referenced a 4,000 person survey conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the impact of the Scottish Child Payment that found it made two-thirds of people feel more financially secure. Meanwhile, in November 2022, when Scottish Child Payment was extended to under-16s, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation described this as a “watershed moment” “which the rest of the UK should take note of”.

I hope you would agree with me therefore that the Scottish Child Payment is clearly benefiting low-income families in Scotland. I was delighted by the feedback the Committee had from stakeholders during the mini-inquiry on how well the Scottish Child Payment is targeted and the value for money it represents, as well as their views on the clear impact that Scottish Child Payment is already having on families.

Further information on the impact of Scottish Child Payment will be gathered through the next stage of evaluation of the Five Family Payments that is currently being undertaken. It will use quantitative data from a large scale survey, complemented by qualitative data from interviews, to assess the medium-term impact of the payments on debt, material deprivation, food insecurity, and health and wellbeing. It will measure outcomes for both households and children, and how the payments impact different groups based on factors such as demographics and household characteristics.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if the Committee requires further information.

Yours sincerely,

Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice

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St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

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