



Patrick Harvie MSP

Scottish Parliament, MG-18
Holyrood, Edinburgh EH99 1SP
Tel: 0131 348 6363
Fax: 0131 348 6375
RNID Typetalk 18001 0131 348 6363

Unit 3 Mercat House, 19 Argyle Court
1103 Argyle Street – The Hidden Lane
GLASGOW, G3 8ND
Tel: 0141 221 6999
RNID Typetalk 18001 0141 221 6999

patrick.harvie.msp@parliament.scot
www.patrickharviemsp.com

Kate Forbes MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Finance
Scottish Government

8 March 2021

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to engage in discussions over recent weeks regarding the budget for 2021/22.

As you know the Scottish Greens have placed a high priority on the need to support household incomes, particularly for those most severely affected by the pandemic, as well as investment in a green recovery. I am pleased at the progress we have made in addressing these priorities.

The introduction of Pandemic Relief Payments to households in receipt of Council Tax Reduction and to families of children currently eligible for free school meals will make a significant difference to many low income households, families and children who have struggled over the past year.

We recognise that the Scottish Government's public sector pay policy, as announced alongside the publication of the budget, was not as restrictive as the UK equivalent. However we were clear that it needed to go further both to protect those with the lowest incomes, and to recognise the significant contribution which has been shown by all public sector workers over the past year. They have been applauded on the doorsteps, but they have a right to expect more than applause. We believe that the Green MSPs aim at all times to operate best practice in complying with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (the GDPR), the Data Protection Act 1998 and any Act that replaces the Data Protection Act. You can find details of our privacy policy at www.greens.scot/msp-privacy-notice

additional commitments that have been made as a result of our discussions will deliver these priorities in a progressive way. We will of course continue to respect the position of public sector unions who are the voice of their members, including in the forthcoming NHS Scotland pay review. We hope that this additional commitment, which will be funded for the wider devolved public sector beyond the Scottish Government's own workforce, will be welcomed.

Expansion of universal benefits will also make a difference to household incomes. Extending the policy of free bus travel for young people which was agreed in last year's budget is an important step forward. While we will continue to argue for further expansion of this policy towards the goal of free public transport for all, the commitment to widen the policy in 2021/22 to include all young people aged 21 and under is very welcome.

There is no doubt that universal free school meals can make a big contribution to tackling poverty and improving health. The phased introduction of this policy for primary schools, including P4&5 as well as holiday provision for all eligible pupils this year, expanding to cover P6&7 in 2022/23, is a positive way forward. I am delighted that hundreds of thousands of children will benefit from free school meals as a result of this deal.

On capital spending, the package of measures we have agreed upon will make progress on a wide range of critically important issues. Investing in active travel and energy efficiency is key to meeting our climate targets and a green recovery from COVID19. The increased budget for these measures as a result of our deals this and last year is welcome, though we believe they must continue to increase over the coming years. On biodiversity, the new nature restoration fund will deliver significant and much needed gains for wildlife, and we look forward to seeing the difference made by the funded projects. This will be further enhanced by the increase in agri-environment funding, which will make a welcome contribution to supporting low carbon, wildlife friendly farming.

Finally, the Scottish Greens have long called for an expansion of the self-isolation support grant, and though we maintain that it should be universal, we welcome the recent expansion in eligibility and the funding that has been made available for it. On the basis of the above changes being made to the Budget, we will vote in favour at Stage 3, and in favour of the non-domestic rates order and the local government finance order.

Thank you again for continuing to work constructively with the Green MSPs towards budget changes which will meet the interests of the people of Scotland.

Yours sincerely,



Patrick Harvie MSP

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