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Dear Mr Walker,

Thank you very much for your e-mails of 28 November to me, as well as to the First Minister Rt Hon John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic, Kate Forbes MSP, and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, Shona Robison MSP, in which you welcomed the opportunity to discuss your work with us and shared your four key asks of the Scottish Government. Thank you also for sharing your Includem briefing note with us. As Cabinet Secretary with responsibility for youth justice I am writing on behalf of the other recipients. I also understand that you have contacted the Scottish Government separately in relation to some of the asks described in your briefing note.

Although I am unable to commit to a meeting at present, I am extremely grateful to Includem colleagues for their valuable work supporting vulnerable children and families across Scotland, whether through early and effective intervention or whole family support projects such as ADAPT, Keeping Connected or BRAVE Stirling. I look forward to maintaining the excellent working relationship we have with your organisation over the coming months.

I thought it may be helpful to reflect briefly on the key asks you have included in your briefing paper. With regard to the national insurance increase on public services, I would like to assure you that I share the view expressed by my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP that the increase in eNICs and the resulting effect that this will have on the children's social care sector in Scotland is of great concern to the Scottish Government.

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Tha Ministearanna h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)



As stated in Ms Somerville's letter to Martin Dorchester of 11 December, both Neil Gray, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, and Shona Robison, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, have written to the UK Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Wes Streeting MP and to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and we continue to press the UK Government on this matter.

Turning to Includem's ask to support longer-term sustainable funding for third sector organisations which support children, young people and families across Scotland, the Scottish Government continues to face the most challenging financial situation since devolution, but we do acknowledge that the sector needs clarity and stability to secure its resilience and to grow its capacity. We continue to be guided by the priorities set out by the First Minister.

This means prioritising our limited resources so that spending has the greatest impact. Our public finances remain under pressure with continued high demand for public services. Any certainty that we can offer to organisations to help plan ahead is impacted by UK Government decisions. We intend to publish the 2025 Medium Term Fiscal Strategy (MTFS) after the conclusion of the UK Government's multi-year spending review, due to conclude in Spring 2025. This will be accompanied by a five-year fiscal sustainability delivery plan which will outline the specific actions being undertaken to deliver sustainable finances. The Delivery Plan will build on the opportunity we have with the upcoming UK Spending Review, and will help support a future Scottish Government Spending Review.

In the meantime, we remain committed to developing a Fairer Funding approach for the sector. We are committed to ensuring that grant making is continuously improved and that best practice in grant management is mainstreamed across government. Offering multi-year funding as the default is part of our long-term ambition to embed systemic change, and to create the conditions for the third sector to thrive as part of a mixed economy. It is important to recognise that multi-year funding is very challenging to deliver in the current context, as any commitments inevitably reduce flexibility in future year budgets.

Funding of Includem's Education Wellbeing Service and Flexible and Emergency Response Service will both require further consideration. You may be aware however that we provide £16 million a year to local authorities to ensure counselling services are in place through secondary schools, which is available for children 10 years and over. We also provide £15 million a year to local authorities to deliver community-based mental health and wellbeing supports and services for children, young people and their families. The supports and services are focused on prevention and early intervention, promoting positive mental health and wellbeing, and tackling emotional distress. Supports and services are available in every local authority area, with more than 300 now in place across the country.

Additionally, the Scottish Government's commitment to the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding (WFWF) Programme recognises that a fundamental change in the system is required to deliver our vision for family support in line with our Vision and National Principles and to Keep the Promise. A vision that focusses on embedding a preventative approach to stop families from reaching crisis but that also recognises the need to support families with their broader wellbeing to help them thrive.

The WFWF Programme is enabling the system change required at the local level, principally through existing Children's Services Planning Partnerships (CSPPs), to ensure that every family gets the right support and at the right time, for as long as it is needed. Since 2022 we have invested over £110m through the WFWF Programme, including £96m for Children's Services Planning Partnerships to build local service capacity for change and to transform family support services.

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I hope that the above has been helpful; thank you again for taking the time to write to us.



**ANGELA CONSTANCE**

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