

## **CEL CIS's response to the Scottish Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Committee's call for views on Scotland's public finances in 2023-24: the impact of the cost of living and public service reform**

CEL CIS, the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, based at the University of Strathclyde, is a leading improvement and innovation centre. We improve children's lives by supporting people and organisations to drive long-lasting change in the services they need, and the practices used by people responsible for their care. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Committee's call for views on Scotland's public finances in 2023-24: the impact of the cost of living and public service reform. This response outlines the key issues relevant for children and young people in need of care and protection, their families, as well as care experienced adults. Our response is drawn from engagement with policy consultants with care experience, research evidence, as well as practice experience and policy expertise offered through our long-standing, cross-organisational networks of people across the children's and social care workforce.

The Scottish Government's commitment that Scotland be the 'best place in the world for children to grow up' is well established,<sup>1</sup> as is the aspirational policy agenda that has been set out to achieve this. This includes the outcomes for children and young people included within the [National Performance Framework](#), and the national practice model [Getting it Right for Every Child](#) (GIRFEC), which advocates a range of approaches to support a child and their family from the point a support need is first identified, to when the child and their family need more sustained and specialised support. More recently, there has been a [commitment from Scottish Parliament](#) to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law. Although already ratified by the United Kingdom, this will strengthen requirements to uphold the rights of all children in Scotland. In 2020, Scotland's Independent Review of Care concluded with the publication of [The Promise](#), which set out ambitions for transforming policy, practice and culture in Scotland to ensure that every child grows up loved, safe and respected. There has been widespread support and commitment from Scottish Parliament, government, and nationally and locally across Scotland in statutory and non-statutory organisations to implement The Promise and incorporate the UNCRC.

This aspirational policy agenda, and groundswell of commitment to better meet the needs of children, young people and their families is informed by an understanding that meeting children's needs when they first require help is the right thing to do, but also that investing in spending on preventative and early support, including support to reduce poverty, also avoids increased public spending on support later in their lives, when their needs would likely to have increased if they have gone unmet.<sup>2</sup> There is an urgent need to ensure that all the services which provide this support across the spectrum of children's needs are adequately funded and resourced, with attention to gaps in services and resourcing, especially where these gaps in services have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Delivering for today, investing for tomorrow: the Government's programme for Scotland 2018-2019](#)

<sup>2</sup> Independent Care Review (2020) [Follow the Money](#) Glasgow: Independent Care Review

Ensuring that every child and young person in Scotland receives the love and care they need to flourish requires a sustained commitment to the resourcing of early and preventative support to reduce the incidence, or mitigate impact of any adverse experiences, whilst also meeting any support needs that children and young people have both *now* and *over their lifetime*. This includes all children who have complex, specialist or other long-term needs, including needs that have compounded or increased because they have not been met earlier in their lives. It also includes any other child who is likely to require ongoing support from our health and social care systems, for example, children who have disabilities or who arrive in Scotland as unaccompanied refugees and asylum seekers, who need ongoing support from carers as they grow up. An example is supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children. In the context of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, children and young people have talked about the importance of early and preventative support in their schools and communities to prevent further escalation of mental ill health, as well as crisis support if this is needed.<sup>3</sup> This requires funding to be available for specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to address critical gaps in services,<sup>4</sup> in addition to the sustained funding of early and preventative support. Meeting the needs of children and young people is fundamental to ensuring that the whole population of Scotland is healthy, flourishing and can reach their full potential in life. Decisions around funding of these services must be based on evidence around need and gaps in services, and cannot prioritise needs for early or preventative support over needs for specialist or crisis support.

We understand the challenges around public finances and the current funding climate, so we have highlighted the following critical areas where funding must be retained in order to, at the minimum, meet current policy commitments to children, families and all care experienced people.

### **Early support for families**

Early support for families is a critical element of supporting the needs of children, and it is imperative that funding for early family support continues. Early and ongoing support for families enables children to thrive and remain within their families; this is one of the five foundations of The Promise, based on evidence from children and young people themselves, as well as their families and others who support them.<sup>5</sup> This early support is integral to protecting and promoting the wellbeing of children, and aims to reduce the need for more intense support across a child's lifetime. The [Whole Family Wellbeing Fund](#) will begin to facilitate the systematic changes required to meet the commitment of The Promise. This will require capacity building within statutory services, where it has often been necessary to focus on meeting of families at crisis point, as well as ensuring that the third sector and communities are equipped to offer support consistent across

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<sup>3</sup> Youthlink Scotland (2020) [Lockdown lowdown, A survey of young people in Scotland about their 'new normal' lives as lockdown restrictions change](#); YoungScot (2021) [Lockdown lowdown 3, what young people in Scotland think as lockdown begins to ease](#); Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (2020) Independent Children's Rights Impact Assessment, Edinburgh: Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland; Christina McMellon, C. and MacLachlan, A. (2020) APPENDIX 2: Mental Health: Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA), Edinburgh: Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

<sup>4</sup> Health, Social Care and Sport Committee (2022) [Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People](#), Edinburgh; Scottish Parliament; Public Health Scotland (2021) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) waiting times quarter ending 30 June 2021, Glasgow: Public Health Scotland;

<sup>5</sup> Independent Care Review (2020) [The Promise](#) Glasgow: Independent Care Review (page 6); Independent Care Review (2019) [Journey stage update](#)

Scotland. Evidence,<sup>6</sup> including our experience of building and sustaining complex change, shows that changes, such as ensuring that all families who require support can access this support, will take time to establish. There is a need to more comprehensively plan for the timescales over which complex change occurs,<sup>7</sup> so that the attention and resource required to support this change can be sustained over a significant period of time.

### **Measures to address Poverty**

The Promise emphasizes that addressing poverty is a key factor in improving the wellbeing of children and of supporting families.<sup>8</sup> Evidence has repeatedly shown that there is a complex link between poverty, child abuse and neglect.<sup>9</sup> The cumulative effect of the stresses and difficulties of living with poverty mean that for some families, there is an impact on the children's care.<sup>10</sup> Financial support for families experiencing poverty must be considered as a part of family support.<sup>11</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant uncertainty, disruption and adversity for many across Scotland, and compounded the impact of poverty and inequality. Children,<sup>12</sup> as well as care experienced people, have spoken about the impact on their wellbeing.<sup>13</sup> The ongoing cost of living crisis has further exacerbated this, often to a crisis point in which families or other adults have to sacrifice essentials such as heat, meals or hygiene.<sup>14</sup> Far from being a new fear about the winter ahead, this is a situation families are already experiencing.

There is a need to pay particular attention to the needs of all families who face poverty. We welcome the sustained commitments from Scottish Government in the [Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026](#), reaffirmed in the recent [Resource Spending Review](#). These include a commitment to raise the Scottish Child Payment to £25 per week for all children under 16 by the end of 2022, to mitigate the benefit cap experienced by some families, to support access to employment for parents, to expand free school meal provision and sustain the Scottish Attainment Fund.<sup>15</sup> Though we recognise the limits of the Scottish Parliament's power to make changes in relation to devolved social security matters, these commitments make steps to mitigate the discrepancy between wages, social security rates, and inflation. Whilst we welcome the commitment from Scottish Government to making a 'bridging payment' for children under 5 before the increased Scottish Child Payment commences at the end of the year, this will result in a discrepancy between payments families who have older children receive. Alongside other

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<sup>6</sup> Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S.E., Blasé, K.A., Friedman, R.M., & Wallace, F (2005) *Implementation Research: A synthesis of the literature*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, The National Implementation Research Network.

<sup>7</sup> Drawn from learning from the Addressing Neglect and Enhancing Wellbeing (ANEW) programme and the Permanence and Care Excellence (PACE) programme; CELCIS (2020) [The Permanence and Care Excellence \(PACE\) programme Improvement in practice: leading positive change for children's services](#), Glasgow: CELCIS

<sup>8</sup> Independent Care Review (2020) [The Promise](#) Glasgow: Independent Care Review (page 17)

<sup>9</sup> Bywaters, P, Skinner, G, et al. (2022) [The Relationship Between Poverty and Child Abuse and Neglect: New Evidence](#), Nuffield Foundation. Bywaters, P, et al., (2016) [The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review](#), York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Pg.3

<sup>10</sup> Scullin, K & Galloway, S (2014) [Challenges from the frontline: Supporting families with multiple adversity at time of austerity](#), Barnardo's & NSPCC.

<sup>11</sup> Independent Care Review (2020) [The Promise](#) Glasgow: Independent Care Review (page 17)

<sup>12</sup> Children's Parliament (2020) [How are you doing? A report on the findings from the How are you doing? survey](#) (page 40)

<sup>13</sup> Who Cares? Scotland (2020) [The impact of COVID-19 guidance on Scotland's care experienced community](#)

<sup>14</sup> Schmuecker, K., Matejic, P., Bestwick, M. and Clark, T. (2022) [Going without: deepening poverty in the UK](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>15</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Resource Spending Review 2022](#)

organizations across Scotland, we have recently co-signed a letter to the First Minister asking for a commitment to match these 'bridging payments' for all children under 16.<sup>16</sup> Other actions within the powers of the Scottish administration should also be considered to further mitigate the impacts of poverty. These include actions to increase flexibility and support (as well as access) to employment for parents, and support with mental health and housing.<sup>17</sup> This is especially important considering new data showing an increase in the number of open homelessness applications and an increase in the number of children living in temporary accommodation.<sup>18</sup>

Financial precariousness and low income also have a significant impact on kinship carers. Evidence highlights a trend between deprivation and higher rates of kinship care in Scotland,<sup>19</sup> and that financial and material hardship for people caring for children.<sup>20</sup> We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment set out in [Keeping The Promise: Scottish Government Implementation Plan](#) to set a Recommended National Allowance rate for foster and kinship allowances, which is a necessary and urgent step towards equity for kinship carers whose financial allowance varies from foster carers and can also vary significantly depending on local authority area.

### **Children and young people leaving care**

There are significant and enduring gaps in the support provided to children and young people when they leave care, despite developments in legislative, policy and practice to remedy this and provide support where this is needed through Continuing Care, and Aftercare duties. Differences in the statutory frameworks between child protection and support and adult protection and support mean that children and young people who have been supported up to the age of 16 (or 18) might not fit the criteria to receive support for adult services. This can create a level of risk for children and young people who can be caught in between child services and adult services, leaving many young people without adequate support should their situation be unsafe, or if they have significant support needs, which may have increased or compounded if they have not been fully met earlier in childhood.<sup>21</sup>

These experiences of gaps in support can often be exacerbated when care experienced children leave care to live independently. The most recent year data that is available from Scotland is from 2015 and shows that the average age that care experienced children and young people leave home is 17.<sup>22</sup> This is in stark contrast to the average age for the general population leaving the family home in Scotland, which is around 26 years.<sup>23</sup> This means that too often emotional, financial and practical support is suddenly ruptured, leaving care experienced young people to cope with the complexities of independent living at a very early age. This has an impact on their wellbeing.<sup>24</sup> The link

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<sup>16</sup> [https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/Letter%20to%20First%20Minister%20-%20doubling%20of%20bridging%20payments%20\\_0.pdf](https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/Letter%20to%20First%20Minister%20-%20doubling%20of%20bridging%20payments%20_0.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children (2022) [Delivering for families? JRF and Save the Children's response to Best Start, Bright Futures the Scottish Government's second Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan;](#)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2021-22/>

<sup>19</sup> McCartan, C., Bunting, L., Bywaters, P., Davidson, G., Elliot, M. & Hooper, J. (2018) 'A Four-Nation Comparison of Kinship Care in the UK: The Relationship between Formal Kinship Care and Deprivation' *Social Policy and Society*, 17(4), 619-635.

<sup>20</sup> Young E and Hill L. (2020) [The highs and lows of kinship care: supplementary analysis of a comprehensive survey of kinship carers in Scotland in 2019](#), Family Rights Group

<sup>21</sup> Stein, M. (2012) *Young People Leaving Care: Supporting Pathways to Adulthood*

<sup>22</sup> CELCIS (2015) [Housing Options and Care Leavers: Improving Outcomes into Adulthood](#) Glasgow: CELCIS

<sup>23</sup> 'A Way Home Scotland' Coalition. (2019). [Youth homeless prevention pathway: Improving care leavers' housing pathways](#)

<sup>24</sup> Stein, M (2005) [Resilience and Young People Leaving Care: Overcoming the odds](#). Joseph Rowntree Foundation

between financial insecurity and poverty and wellbeing for care leavers is stark, with financial worries often articulated by young people leaving care.<sup>25</sup> Care experienced young people who study full time are also at risk of extreme financial hardship, as the funding provided through the Care Experienced Students Bursary is unlikely to cover living costs as these rise.<sup>26</sup>

Implementation of legislation to support more care experienced people '[stay put](#)' with their carers, as well as enabling and encouraging positive, enduring relationships with former carers is critical to young people feeling supported when they make life transitions.<sup>27</sup> Research by CELCIS on the consistency of the implementation of these legal duties offers learning around how stakeholders plan for and prioritise continuing care provision for young people. This research also raises the need for improved national finance and resource planning to guarantee care setting capacity so that every eligible young person can access continuing care entitlement.<sup>28</sup> New [resources](#) have been developed with care experienced young people to increase children and young people's understanding of their rights to Continuing Care, and further participatory research with care experienced young people to understand their experiences of continuing care is currently ongoing.

In light of the substantial and growing increases to cost of living, the need to guarantee a minimum income for everyone in Scotland is especially relevant and will be crucial to protect standards of living and wellbeing. This approach can be particularly effective in addressing existing disparities in income for those known to be particularly at risk of experiencing poverty, such as care leavers. Earlier this year, the Welsh Government began piloting a basic income scheme for care leavers, under which every young person leaving care who turns 18 during a 12-month period is able to participate and receive an unconditional monthly payment of £1,600 (before tax) for 24 months.<sup>29</sup> Whilst this pilot is at an early stage, evidence from the planned evaluation will offer crucial learning about what works to support care experienced people as they transition to adulthood, and to mitigate the impact of inequalities in their income or wellbeing resulting any changes or gaps in support as they grow up. We welcome the [current work](#) by Scottish Government to progress the idea of guaranteeing a minimum income for everyone in Scotland and urge for sustained attention to this going forward. This must incorporate evidence around what will be required for any scheme to make the intended difference to the lives of the people it is targeted at, and crucially, this evidence must include the voices of those with lived experience.

### **Support for the Workforce**

To provide all children and young people with the care that they need and deserve, we must value their caregivers, including birth families, residential carers, foster carers, kinship carers and adoptive parents. We must also value the workforce across the breadth of statutory, third sector and community services in social care, in health, education, justice and youth work services, all of whom have a role in supporting children. Every policy aspiration to uphold the rights and support the wellbeing of

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<sup>25</sup> Baker, C. (2017) [Care leavers' views on their transition to adulthood: A rapid review of the evidence](#). Coram Voice

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.nus.org.uk/campaign-hub/cost-of-living-crisis?i=0>

<sup>27</sup> Swain, V. (2016) [Keep Connected: Maintaining Relationships When Moving On](#). TFN; Boddy J (2013) [Understanding permanence for looked after children](#): A review of research for the Care Inquiry. London: The Care Inquiry.

<sup>28</sup> Lough Dennell, B; McGhee, L; Porter, R. (2022) [Continuing Care: An exploration of implementation](#). Glasgow: CELCIS.

<sup>29</sup> <https://gov.wales/written-statement-basic-income-pilot-care-leavers-wales>

children, families and adults is dependent on the care and skills of those who interact with them. For children and young people, high quality care is ensured through relationships based on trust, continuity and stability.<sup>30</sup>

We have set out the importance of supporting the families and carers of children and young people, but there is also a need to value and support the workforce. This means that we must ensure that the workforce has the support and capacity necessary to practice in a way that is skilled, caring and consistent. For instance, through planning to ensure that caseloads enable practitioners to have the time to spend with those they support, developing relationships or supporting any behaviours that arise due to previous experiences of trauma.<sup>31</sup> It also requires planning to ensure that practitioners have the necessary support in their line management arrangements and within supervision to discuss challenges and stresses that arise in practice.

The workforce at all levels has been working above and beyond the requirements of their roles to fill gaps in support that have emerged over the COVID-19 pandemic. Working this way is not sustainable in the long-term, and significant recruitment and retention issues have already emerged across the health, social care and social work sectors.<sup>32</sup> Caring work like this is vital to ensure the wellbeing of the Scottish population now and in the future, and it must be properly valued. This will require commitment from strategic leadership to map and allocate necessary resources, and it is imperative that sufficient funding is available for strategic leadership to do so. That wages reflect the value of this work, and planning for the support of, and management of capacity across the workforce must be considered within this planning. The cost of living crisis will affect the whole workforce, but will disproportionately affect those who are lower paid, who are often our most skilled social care workers. This skilled and caring work must be valued and paid accordingly. Components such as wages and management capacity will often be enacted through commissioning processes, for both statutory and non-statutory functions and services. In addition to attention to wages and capacity, it is also imperative to commission services that offer consistent support over the long-term that are required to develop relationships and carry out support that make a difference to children and young people. The short termism of commissioned services can be detrimental by their very nature.

We recognise the budgetary challenges currently facing the Scottish administration. The Independent Care Review '[Follow the Money](#)' report found that the costs of inadequate provision are borne out in significant human costs, impacting on the wellbeing of a person throughout their lifetime, but also resulting in increased financial cost to meet escalating and compounding needs.<sup>33</sup> These consequences are avoidable if we provide the care and support that meets the needs of children, families and other adults with care experience. The priorities outlined in this response offer evidence-based approaches and include the perspectives of people with lived experience and practitioners who support them. These approaches are necessary, and will be effective in contributing to meeting Scotland's commitment to ensure that current and future populations feel loved, supported and included. They require sustained use of public funding, targeted to where

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<sup>30</sup> Porter, R. B., Mitchell, F., & Giraldo, M. (2020) "Function, quality and outcomes of residential care: Rapid Evidence Review". CELCIS, Glasgow: [www.celcis.org](http://www.celcis.org)

<sup>31</sup> Miller, E and Barrie, K (2022) Setting the Bar: towards an indicative maximum caseload for Scotland's public sector social workers, Social Work Scotland

<sup>32</sup> Miller, E and Barrie, K (2022) Setting the Bar: towards an indicative maximum caseload for Scotland's public sector social workers, Social Work Scotland

<sup>33</sup> Independent Care Review (2020) [Follow the Money](#) Glasgow: Independent Care Review (pg.3)

the evidence tells us this will have the most positive effect in supporting the lives and wellbeing of children, young people and their families. We would be happy to provide further information in respect to any of the areas discussed here.

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