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28 November 2023

Dear Judith and Mark

Welfare Foods (Best Start Foods) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2023

Thank you for your scrutiny report of 27 September on the Welfare Foods (Best Start Foods) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2023. I want to extend my sincere thanks to the Commission for looking at the Amendment Regulations and working collaboratively with my officials as questions arose throughout the process.

Best Start Foods aims to tackle the impacts of child poverty by improving access to healthy foods and milk for eligible families on a low income. It is expected that removing the income thresholds will result in an additional 20,000 individuals being eligible for Best Start Foods. This will mean more low income families can benefit from the support provided by Best Start Foods. Furthermore, individuals who have fluctuating incomes will be less likely to move in and out of Best Start Foods eligibility. This will provide greater certainty to low income families and help to minimise the need for reapplications.

The five family payments – Best Start Foods, Scottish Child Payment and the three Best Start Grant Payments – are intended to support low income families with the costs of raising a child. By further aligning eligibility for Best Start Foods with Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment, more people will be eligible for all of the five family payments. The five family payments could be worth around £10,000 by the time an eligible child turns six years old, and over £20,000 by the time an eligible child is 16 years old.

The Commission's comments on the Amendments Regulations are very helpful, and I am confident that the introduction of these regulations will improve the client journey, improve access for young parents and significantly increase the number of children that will be eligible to receive all of the five family payments.

I am attaching a copy of the Scottish Government's response to the SCoSS recommendations which I am also sending to the Convener of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee. I can confirm that is my intention to lay the amendment regulations on the 7th December.

Thank you again for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Sille'.

SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE