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Dear Anna,

Thank you for your letter of 7 January regarding the effect of the delay to the UK Budget on Scotland's voluntary organisations.

Scottish Ministers are very aware of the role of the Third Sector in the delivery of services for their portfolios and remain committed to the voluntary sector as a key partner in achieving Scotland's National Outcomes. I welcome the approach taken by the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, Aileen Campbell, and accordingly consideration is being given to third-sector funding requirements across portfolios in light of the circumstances.

It is disgraceful that the UK Government has created this problem. I am deeply unhappy that the UK Government also gave no prior notice before announcing its budget date on 7 January, showing a complete disrespect for the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Budget process. In these exceptional circumstances, created by the UK Government, I agree that it is vital that we give clarity on budgets at the earliest opportunity.

For that reason, I announced on Monday 13 January that the Scottish Budget will be published on 6 February. The timing of the UK Budget on 11 March makes it impossible for us to publish the Scottish Budget after the UK Budget without drastically restricting the time for parliamentary scrutiny. My objective of setting a February Budget date for Scotland is to protect Scottish interests and deliver a Scottish Budget at the earliest opportunity.

We will continue to engage with stakeholders on how best to respond to these exceptional circumstances. We are working closely with the Scottish Parliament to agree a timetable for the Budget Bill to allow for maximum time for scrutiny within a compressed timeline – thereby ensuring certainty as soon as possible for Scotland's vital public services.



DEREK MACKAY

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