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Dear Anna

I write in reference to your letter of 17 January 2020 to Malcolm Wright, the Director-General for Health and Social Care. Given the nature of your letter, I felt that it was appropriate that I respond to you directly.

Firstly, thank you for highlighting the issues faced by the voluntary sector as a result of the delays to the Scottish budget. I am aware that you have written to a number of my Cabinet colleagues in the past few weeks and I am sure I will not be the first to assure you that we recognise these concerns.

The decision by the UK Government to delay bringing forward a UK budget until 11 March 2020 had an unprecedented impact on the Scottish Government's ability to set its own budget. In recognition of the potential for significant impacts to public services as a result of the delay, the Scottish Government took the exceptional step to bring forward publication of its budget to Thursday 6 February 2020.

Despite our actions to deliver the Scottish budget at the earliest opportunity, I am aware that there is still uncertainty for organisations across Scotland and that is why, last month, I asked my policy officials to confirm to voluntary sector stakeholders that 2019-20 funding will be extended for the first three months of financial year 2020-21, pending confirmation of the final budget position. We will also ensure that all organisations are notified of their 2020-21 funding now that the Scottish budget has been announced.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary
are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act
2016. See www.lobbying.scot

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In the spirit of the 'Principles for Positive Partnership', I welcome your views on how best we can work together constructively over the coming weeks to ensure that clarity is provided to all our voluntary organisations at this time.

JEANE FREEMAN

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