



## **Scottish Budget 2019-20 – Wise Group Response**

### **13.12.18**

As one of Scotland's leading social enterprises, the Wise Group is committed to playing a key role in improving social justice across the country. As such, we welcome many of the commitments outlined in the December Scottish budget, including the maintenance of funding across the three key areas of the Wise Group's work: community justice; reducing fuel poverty and energy inefficiency; and employability and skills.

**Community Justice:** The overall community justice budget has been increased slightly by £1.7 million. We continue to support Justice priorities through our leadership of the New Routes PSP, providing people nearing the end of their sentences and on release with a mentoring service that has a marked impact on reducing reoffending: among our New Routes customers who have fully engaged till the end of their programme, re-offending rates stand at 9.7%: substantially less than the national reconviction rate of 30.8%. With this in mind we would hope to see a larger increase for community justice services in next year's Scottish budget allocation.

We welcome the continued support in the Budget for expansion of electronic monitoring and community alternatives to custody and again would hope to see a larger increase in next year's Budget allocation to allow for this to be robustly implemented. It costs up to £40,000 per year to imprison someone in Scotland. It costs just £1,700 per year to support someone in the community through our New Routes mentoring service, achieving arguably more impact in the race to reduce re-offending, as outlined above. Allocating more resources to community alternatives to custody not makes fiscal sense but would fulfil the Government's ambition to work with communities to tackle tough social issues at source.

**Employability and Skills:** As shown in the recently released first round of Fair Start Scotland statistics, we have already supported more than 400 people through our delivery of the programme in the West region and we welcome the increase in funding to support the continued delivery of the programme as part of the £3.8 million increase to the Employability and Training spend. The Government is right to recognise that more resource must be allocated to supporting people with specific barriers, e.g. disability and mental health, to allow them to become ready to move into work. We know that mental health is a key barrier that can prevent the people we work with from progressing; it's why we've invested our own resources into supporting our customers to access counselling quickly and at no cost.

As a values-led social enterprise, our focus is on moving people into work when they are ready, and into employment that is sustainable not only in the short-term but

also in the future labour market. As such, we are pleased to see the announcement of a Digital Start Fund, to support up to 150 people on very low or no income to retrain and gain employment in the digital economy. This offers additional opportunity for us to support some of the people we work with into fair work, with significant potential for career development.

**Fuel poverty/Energy efficiency:** We support the Scottish Government's continued lead on reducing energy inefficiency and fuel poverty, and are proud to play a large role in this work through our continued delivery of the Home Energy Scotland contract for Strathclyde and Central region, and the new Energy Efficient Scotland pilots. The additional £3.6m allocated to supporting households to tackle fuel poverty/energy efficiency is a step in the right direction, but reducing the level of fuel poverty to 5% by 2040 will require additional investment in coming years to ensure this ambitious – but achievable – target is met.

It is regrettable that the Scottish Government has had to apportion money to dealing with the impact of Brexit – money that could be better spent on supporting the people in our society who need it most, and to building a fairer Scotland where no-one is left behind or excluded.

We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with the Scottish Government to develop policies and plans across our key areas of service delivery, and to help build the type of society we aspire to be: one based on fairness, equality and respect, where everyone matters and is valued.

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