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## Building a New Scotland: Social security in an independent Scotland

Today the Scottish Government has published the ninth in our 'Building a New Scotland' series of independence prospectus papers, 'Social security in an independent Scotland', a copy of which is attached.

This government believes social security is a human right and everyone coming into contact with the service should be treated with dignity, fairness and respect. Scotland's system has therefore been built - with our limited, devolved, social security powers - around these principles, showing how different choices can lead to more positive outcomes.

But most social security powers remain reserved to the UK Government. For many years, UK poverty levels have been higher than in independent European countries comparable to Scotland, as well as in larger countries like France and Germany. With thousands pushed into poverty and millions struggling to afford day to day items in a cost of living crisis, it is undeniable that the UK social security system is inadequate and fails to protect people as it should.

The early years of independence offer an opportunity to prioritise immediate improvements to social security. Early steps like scrapping the two child limit and the young parent penalty in Universal Credit, removing the Bedroom Tax from legislation and replacing Universal Credit 'budgeting loans' with grants would start to reduce pressures for those most at risk of poverty.

A comprehensive social security system could also build on the work already in place to recognise the contribution that unpaid carers make to ensuring people throughout Scotland get the care they need and to supporting the Scottish economy. We want Scotland to be a place where all carers are recognised and valued for the contribution they make, where they are enabled to provide the right support for the people they care for while living full, rounded

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lives. No-one should need to put their aspirations and ambitions on hold because they are providing care to a loved one.

We would also be able to do more for unpaid carers and disabled people – free from the limitations of the current devolved settlement. Without the limitations of working within the wider reserved social security and tax system, we could go further, faster, to improve support for unpaid carers, with a more holistic approach via a tax and social security system that works better for all carers.

We would also stop the roll out of the deeply concerning planned changes to reserved ill-health and disability benefits announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Autumn Statement. These changes could mean people receive less financial support from the UK Government because of a change in assessment criteria – not because of any change to their health.

Building a new social security system that eradicates all the inadequacies of the current UK system and delivers an integrated, person-centred, system of support for carers and disabled people would inevitably be a long-term project. Transition plans would be put in place to ensure people continue to receive the payments they are entitled to, on time and in full.

In the longer term, independence offers the opportunity to use innovative approaches to build a social security safety net - for example, by introducing a Minimum Income Guarantee that would provide a universal guarantee of financial security: a right to a decent income, set at a level to ensure everyone can have a dignified quality of life. An independent Scotland could build a system people can turn to for support.

This represents a distinct and new approach to social security in an independent Scotland, one that would reduce poverty and inequality and improve lives. Instead of mitigating cruel Westminster welfare reforms, Scotland will invest in our future for the common weal.

I would be very happy to discuss this with you and our Parliamentary colleagues further, as the national discussion on independence continues.

**Jamie Hepburn**

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