

An Open Letter to Scotland's Council Leaders

Families have never been under so much pressure. The cost of living crisis has grown into a full-scale catastrophe for low income families. Many don't know how they will heat their homes this winter or feed their children.

Eye watering energy bills, relentlessly rising food costs and less money in the pockets of those on the lowest incomes have created the conditions for a social emergency. Both the UK and Scottish Governments are rightly facing growing calls to do everything they can to help families keep their heads above water against this financial tsunami.

At Aberlour we are seeing more and more families falling into unmanageable debt as they struggle to cope. In most cases this is debt to public bodies, such as council tax, housing arrears and even school meal debt.

Earlier this year Aberlour published a report into the scale of school meal debt faced by low income families not eligible for free school meals. We found that more than £1m in school meal debt is owed by families across Scotland. We have called on the Scottish Government to work with local authorities to agree a debt amnesty for all outstanding school meal debt. We know that some councils have already taken steps to write this debt off, which shows it is within councils' power to do so.

Now the situation is even worse than it was just a few months ago, with families reeling from reports of an unprecedented spike in energy bills predicted for the autumn and winter. We are appealing directly to you as council leaders across Scotland to do everything you can to help families on the lowest incomes. As a first step we urge you to work with headteachers and schools in your area to write off any outstanding school meal debt and to give some relief to those families who are already in financial crisis.

Families tell us they simply can't absorb any more costs as they fall deeper and deeper into debt trying to make ends meet. Reducing the debt burden for those with school meal debts and supporting them to make sure their children do not go hungry at school would help alleviate some of the financial pressure for thousands of families across Scotland.

We continue to call on Scottish Government to maximise eligibility for free school meals for low income working families with immediate effect. This will

mean more families receive this entitlement, as well as reduce financial hardship, help end school meal debt and the likelihood of hidden hunger in secondary schools.

We know councils can't commit to do this themselves. But you can choose to write off school meal debt for families. So, we ask you – on behalf of families across Scotland burdened with debt – to do what you can to help, and to cancel school meal debt owed in your area in order to provide some relief to families who simply can't take any more.

Yours sincerely,



SallyAnn Kelly
Chief Executive