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Nicola Sturgeon MSP, First Minister
Via email: firstminister@gov.scot

Email: kanec@stirling.gov.uk

Date: 14 March 2023

Dear First Minister

Clarification on Scottish Government funding for Sistema's 'Big Noise Raploch'

At a Stirling Council meeting on 2nd March, councillors across the political spectrum acknowledged that tough decisions were unavoidable to plug our budget gap.

We have managed, with great difficulty, to ensure that no one organisation or council department has borne a cut that would make the service they provide undeliverable or unsustainable.

We are proud that 'Big Noise Raploch' was the first Sistema project in Scotland. We were able – this year - to limit the cut to their award to £44,000, with council approving £392,000 for 2023/24.

I was surprised to learn on Twitter of your intentions regarding Scottish Government funding support for Sistema projects. Had we known of your intentions ahead of our budget meeting, we would have been able to take different decisions.

Stirling Council debated an urgent business paper at our meeting on 9th March and resolved that I should write to you expressing our regret that the funding announcement came through Twitter rather than through proper established channels, and our disappointment that, over a week since reading the tweet, we have received no additional information through any channel on this funding or the mechanism by which funds will be distributed.

If the Government wishes to fund Big Noise projects, I welcome this, but it is important Aberdeen, Dundee, Stirling, Edinburgh and Glasgow are treated equally and fairly.

It is crucial that we receive confirmation of your intent to extend 100% budget support to all Big Noise projects in the coming days in order that we can revisit some of our budget decisions prior to the start of the new financial year. Council has already resolved to meet before the end of March in expectation of a positive and quick confirmation being received.

I felt it important to share the cuts already being discussed for revisiting include:

- No alternation to opening times of Fintry and Aberfoyle Nurseries;
- No increase in non-statutory childcare fees in any of our nurseries or any increase in MECS charges for any of our vulnerable and elderly citizens;
- No reductions in budgets to the Smith museum, TSI, Stirling Community Enterprises or local events budget (including book and science festivals);
- No removal of the Springkerse "Park and Ride" bus service;
- No removal of the 100% subsidy for over 60s 'bulky waste' uplifts; and

- No cuts to our digital inclusion work in libraries nor to our universal youth provision.

This year the scale of the financial challenge facing Stirling Council is of a magnitude which has never been experienced before. I recognise the Scottish Government is also wrestling with budget challenges, but I hope you can provide the clarity and confirmation we seek. I look forward to hearing from you as a matter of urgency.

Kind regards

Councillor Chris Kane

Leader of Stirling Council