

Women's Policy Group NI

The Rt. Hon. Chris Heaton Harris MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Office
Erskine House, 20-32 Chichester Street
Belfast BT1 4GF

Via email to: correspondence@nio.gov.uk

15th August 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

This month, the Government launched the Community Organisations Cost of Living Fund worth £76 million, to provide support for those organisations at the coalface of the cost of living crisis, so that they can support those most affected by the crisis. We welcome this intervention, but we note with dismay that the proportion of that fund due to Northern Ireland via the Barnett Formula, which would ordinarily go to the Executive to spend, is not expected to reach those most in need, as it will in England, Scotland and Wales.

We are aware that, while announcing the 2023/24 Budget in April of this year, you indicated that any in-year increases to the block grant would be allocated towards paying off the outstanding balance of overspend from previous years. We appeal to you to make an exception in these circumstances and to allow this grant to be used for its intended purpose.

The cost of living crisis is causing hunger, cold and stress all over the UK, and Northern Ireland is no different in that regard. We have the highest uptake of Universal Credit and equivalent legacy benefits in the UK, higher prevalence of mental health problems, and more people cutting back on essentials than anywhere else in the UK. Yet again, however, we are asked to suffer more than is needed, for longer than is needed, while others are given relief. To

exacerbate the problem, some of the organisations that stand in the gap here are struggling so badly that they may soon collapse, leaving people in even deeper crisis. The Government clearly recognise that this situation merits intervention, and that is true in Northern Ireland as well as in Great Britain.

Whatever the reasons for previous overspending, whatever the reasons for political deadlock, we cannot allow the most vulnerable people in Northern Ireland - who had no part in creating the crisis - to suffer for these circumstances. The amount of money associated with this grant will not make a significant dent in the debt accrued, but it would make a significant difference in local communities.

We urge you to use the additional monies from Westminster to alleviate some of the worst effects of the cost-of-living crisis. We are available to meet to further discuss the difference this additional funding would make for the most vulnerable in Northern Ireland, and we hope you make the right decision to improve lives in Northern Ireland, not worsen them.

Signed,

Elaine Crory, Women's Policy Group
On behalf of The *Where's Our Democracy?* Campaign

Endorsed by the following MLAs and MPs:

1. Allen, Andy MLA
2. Archibald, Caoimhe MLA
3. Armstrong, Kellie MLA
4. Baker, Danny MLA
5. Beattie, Doug MLA
6. Blair, John MLA
7. Boylan, Cathal MLA
8. Bradshaw, Paula MLA
9. Brett, Philip MLA
10. Brogan, Nicola MLA
11. Brown, Patrick MLA
12. Butler, Robbie MLA
13. Carroll, Gerry MLA
14. Delargy, Pádraig MLA
15. Dickson, Stewart MLA
16. Dillon, Linda MLA
17. Dolan, Jemma MLA
18. Donnelly, Danny MLA

19. Easton, Alex MLA
20. Eastwood, Sorcha MLA
21. Egan, Connie MLA
22. Elliot, Tom MLA
23. Ennis, Sinéad MLA
24. Ferguson, Ciara MLA
25. Flynn, Órlaithí MLA
26. Gildernew, Colm MLA
27. Hanna, Claire MP
28. Hargey, Deirdre MLA
29. Honeyford, David MLA
30. Hunter, Cara MLA
31. Kearney, Declan MLA
32. Kelly, Gerry MLA
33. Kimmins, Liz MLA
34. Long, Naomi MLA
35. Mason, Cathy MLA
36. Mathison, Nick MLA
37. McAleer, Declan MLA
38. McAllister, Nuala MLA
39. McGuigan, Philip MLA
40. McHugh, Maolíosa MLA
41. McLaughlin, Sinead MLA
42. McReynolds, Peter MLA
43. Muir, Andrew MLA
44. Mulholland, Sian MLA
45. Murphy, Áine MLA
46. Murphy, Conor MLA
47. Nesbitt, Mike MLA
48. Ní Chuilín, Carál MLA
49. Nicholl, Kate MLA
50. O'Dowd, John MLA
51. O'Neill, Michelle MLA
52. Paisley, Ian MP
53. Reilly, Aisling MLA
54. Sheehan, Pat MLA
55. Sheeran, Emma MLA
56. Sugden, Claire MLA