

Where's Our Democracy? Campaign - Media Statement

The *Where's Our Democracy?* campaign have written to the Secretary of State regarding the Community Organisations Cost of Living Fund, alerting him to the dire need for these funds to be directed to the intended communities in Northern Ireland - those most impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. Earlier in the year, the Secretary of State made a harmful commitment to direct any additional in-year funds to paying off the overspend from the previous financial year. However, we emphasise that the need in communities is too great to not use these funds for their intended purposes, and we will continue to push against the fiscal violence imposed on the most vulnerable in our communities.

The Community Organisations Cost of Living Fund is a scheme from the Westminster Department for Culture, Media, and Sport and delivered by The National Lottery Community Fund. Announced in July, the scheme will see £76 million going into crucial frontline support services in communities across the U.K. hit hardest by the cost-of-living crisis, delivered proportionally through the Barnett formula.

However, due to the Secretary of State's previous decision to use in-year increases for the overspend, communities in Northern Ireland will not see the benefits that Scotland, England, and Wales will see. This is particularly harmful as Northern Ireland has the highest uptake of Universal Credit and equivalent legacy benefits in the UK, a higher prevalence of mental health problems, and more people cutting back on essentials than anywhere else in the UK. While the Fund offers communities in the other devolved nations some relief from the worst impacts of the cost-of-living crisis, Northern Ireland will be plunged deeper into a state of crisis that will only cost more over time, as necessary action and assistance are pushed lower on the priority list.

Elaine Crory said: "In my role as Women's Sector Lobbyist I have sought to bring the concerns of groups and individuals across the voluntary and community sector to the attention of decision makers. With no Northern Ireland Executive in place, the sole decision maker on this issue is the Secretary of State. Knowing that his own Government has recognised the cost-of-living crisis as one that needs intervention, and knowing that he has met with community organisations in Northern Ireland who have explained the circumstances they face, we believe the Secretary of State has a moral imperative to act on this issue and to direct this Fund to where it is needed."

The *Where's Our Democracy?* campaign calls on the Secretary of State to use the additional funds for their intended purpose and provide some relief to the most vulnerable and worst-impacted communities in Northern Ireland. This ask has been supported by MLAs and MPs across all parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly, including two independent MLAs, with the exception of the Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV). We have offered to meet with the Secretary of State to discuss this ask and the contents of our letter. It would be a devastating mistake and catastrophic for communities in Northern Ireland if the in-year increases are used for anything other than community relief at a time of grave crisis, and we urge the Secretary of State to make the right decision.

Signed,

The *Where's Our Democracy?* Campaign

'Where's Our Democracy?' is a cross-sector campaign led by the Women's Policy Group NI. You can find out more about the campaign [here](#). Media queries to Elaine Crory, Women's Sector Lobbyist, 07548954710