

# Written Ministerial Statement

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## Department for Communities

### ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE OVER THE CHRISTMAS PERIOD

*Published at 10.00 am on Thursday 10 December 2020.*

**Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister for Communities):** This statement provides an update on actions being taken to provide additional support for vulnerable people over Christmas and New Year and beyond to March 2021.

I have allocated a further £6.5 million to support those most severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic by tackling emotional and material need over the Christmas and New Year period.

This funding, which was secured in the October monitoring round, will see £3.5million used to support the most vulnerable in our society to access food and other essential items to take account of the challenges faced at this time of year, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. These immediate to medium term interventions are designed to support those experiencing food poverty and insecurity between now and the end of March 2021. This funding will also allow for essential items such as sanitary products, given the impact of period poverty on individuals and families in our community. This funding should help to ensure that people do not have to choose between these essential items, and provide dignified, compassionate support for those in need.

I can confirm that £2.5m of the funding will be allocated to local councils for support with food and everyday items and will build on the previous support provided by my department earlier in the year to build the capacity of community food providers and implement more sustainable responses to food insecurity. This allocation will also provide support for volunteering in recognition of the crucial role that volunteers have played in the crisis to date.

In addition, a further £1m is being provided to established charities including St Vincent De Paul (SVP), the Salvation Army, Barnardo's, Save the Children and the food poverty charity, Fareshare. This will help to enhance their seasonal campaigns and increase the reach and impact of the interventions they all currently deliver, building on their track record across many years.

The remaining £3million will be used to fund a series of important Wellbeing initiatives, aimed at keeping people Warm, Well and Connected. This initiative was developed through engagement with the voluntary and community sector, on the basis of their insights into the difficulties being faced within our community. They reported concerns around people being able to light and heat their homes, increasing numbers of people feeling isolated and struggling, and the impact of a lack of digital connectivity. The Warm, Well and Connected initiative will target at least 15,000 people who have been most adversely impacted by the pandemic, to reduce their risk of isolation, to improve their emotional wellbeing, to promote the take up of support to address good mental health, supporting participation in physical exercise and the need to eat well. An important element of the initiative will be access to immediate help with the cost of home heating for those who find themselves with no other means of support, particularly over the Christmas and New Year period.

The initiative will be delivered in partnership with local government, 29 Healthy Living Centres, the six Rural Support Networks, which together reach 1,500 smaller rural organisations and Bryson Care. Importantly, additional partners include the Age, Disability, Carers and LGBT plus sectors, through representative groups.

I am also very pleased that I am supporting a specific Wellbeing and Resilience programme for the Voluntary and Community Sector workforce, recognising the fact that the community sector at grass roots level have been front line responders since March. We are indebted to them for the role they have played, and it is important that we now support their continued wellbeing and build resilience for the next phase of the Covid response, and for the recovery period ahead.

All of these initiatives have been developed through co-design with a wide range of partners with a view to addressing objective need across our communities as a result of the Covid pandemic, taking into account the particular issues faced at this time of year.