

# Written Ministerial Statement

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## Department for Communities

### COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

*Published on Wednesday 1 June 2022.*

**Ms Hargey (The Minister for Communities):** Members will be acutely aware of the burden and pressures on workers, families and communities here as a direct result of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis that is worsening by the day.

We all heard the views and lived experience of people on the doorsteps only a few weeks ago in the run up to the election and we all stood before the electorate on a mandate that put responding to the cost of living crisis top of all our agendas, alongside Health, in terms of our commitment to deliver change in any new Assembly.

I am hearing every day, as all of you are, from people in different circumstances who are struggling, and even suffering, under the impact of uncontrolled and rising costs of food, energy and fuel. I am committed to doing all within my power to put more money into people's pockets and to implement all additional support measures that I can to mitigate the impacts our people are enduring.

In the last two weeks I have been out in person, engaging at grass roots level right across our community and listening to the issues that are affecting people on the ground. I have heard, at first hand, that due to the pressure of rising energy and food costs, many people are struggling to make ends meet and are fearful of further price hikes. They have told me about the difficult choices they are having to make and the wellbeing and mental health impacts arising from the constant stress and worry about how to eat, stay warm and provide for their families. I have heard about the people in more isolated rural communities, finding it harder to access services and support due to higher costs.

As Communities Minister my top priority is to support people. I will continue to support our Voluntary & Community Sector and its efforts to respond, as it always does, to the issues brought about by this cost-of-living crisis. To that end, I have re-established the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Leadership Group to advise, inform and shape the emerging policy and operational response. The lessons from the last two years demonstrate how much we can achieve by working collaboratively and in partnership with those directly impacted by what we deliver in policy terms. I am determined that we take these valuable experiences to target our responses even more directly to get the right support to those in our communities who are bearing the brunt of this crisis.

The absence of an Executive and an agreed Executive budget creates very real difficulties and challenges. Despite this I have tasked my officials, working alongside the VCS Cost of Living Leadership Group, to explore all options to mitigate the problems we are presented with.