



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Rt. Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Leader's Office

Town Hall
Victoria Square
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Merseyside
WA10 1HP

Contact: David Baines
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Our ref: DB/KF

1st November 2022

The cost of living emergency and fair funding for essential services

Dear Chancellor,

We write to you as representatives of public, private, faith and voluntary sector organisations in St Helens Borough regarding the urgent and dangerous threat to essential services and our communities posed by the cost of living emergency.

For over a decade we have seen increasing demand for services, and in recent months this has escalated even further with more and more households requiring help.

We convened an urgent meeting on 19th October and heard extremely worrying evidence from partners including:

- GPs reporting some of their most vulnerable patients are not taking medicines as they can't afford prescription charges.
- Citizens Advice reporting that they have seen a 100% increase in people requesting debt advice and they don't have enough staff to cope with demands.
- Our two main foodbanks ran out of food in September for the first time in their history.
- Contact Cares, our telephone line for all care needs, has seen a 50% increase in calls compared to this time last year.
- The Council Contact Centre has seen telephone contact triple as more and more residents seek help and advice.
- Torus, the biggest provider of social housing in St Helens, reporting an unprecedented increase in the number of people in rent arrears.
- Frontline staff reporting concerns that more people are experiencing suicidal thoughts due to financial pressures.
- The police reporting they are responding to higher levels of crime and disorder.
- More keyworkers at the Council and partner organisations are themselves accessing foodbanks for the first time.

We are extremely concerned about the impact that further public service cuts would have on residents and our ability to support them.

At the exact moment that many in our communities need public services more than ever, those services themselves are facing a cliff edge. It is a perfect storm with potentially severe consequences.

Many, if not all, providers of essential support services are already struggling. For example, St Helens Borough Council faces an estimated funding gap of £14m for 2023/24, but there is nothing left for the Council to cut that won't further harm its ability to support the most vulnerable and grow the local economy. The Conservative Chair of the Local Government Association, Cllr James Jamieson, recently spoke about a "tidal wave" of cost and inflationary pressures facing councils, and towns and cities across the country are all saying the same thing – unless government urgently provide fair funding to councils, residents can expect council tax to continue to rise and services to be cut back or scrapped altogether.

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HELP WITH THE COST OF LIVING

Our asks:

Ahead of your statement in November we ask you to recognise the economic and humanitarian urgency of this situation and to give essential services the fair funding they need in order to provide necessary support, and to give residents and businesses as much direct financial support as possible.

We ask you specifically to consider the following measures:

- Provide councils and local partners with adequate, sustainable resources to maintain their operational and financial sustainability, and give them the freedom and flexibility to lead local approaches, for example prioritising vulnerable households ensuring that people on pre-paid energy meters can access fuel vouchers.
- Provide a fair, accessible, and sufficient benefits system, maintained at the rate of inflation, providing financial stability for low income working households, protecting those who are unable to work, reducing health inequalities and linking effectively with key local partners to improve employment outcomes and wellbeing.
- Raise the threshold to increase the number of people eligible for free prescriptions
- To enable all Primary schools to provide children with a healthy breakfast and to provide universal free school meals for all Primary pupils.
- To harness a percentage of the profits made by the energy suppliers to fund debt and welfare advice.
- To do more to clamp down on loan sharks.
- To provide subsidies to anyone who is at risk of severe illness due to cold weather (those aged over 65, those with respiratory illness and those with mobility problems) to ensure they can keep their houses heated.

St Helens Borough has the people and the potential to do great things – we need government to back us in the short term now to get through this emergency, and in the long term to help us fulfil that potential.

We look forward to hearing from you and to your statement on 17th November.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr David Baines, Leader of St Helens Borough Council

Andrew Maley, Representative of Primary and Special Association of Head teachers (PASH)

Andrew Reid MBE, Chair, The Standing Tall Foundation

Angela Metcalfe, The Hope Centre

Cath Fogarty, Executive Director Corporate Services, St Helens Borough Council

Cath Murray Howard, Torus

Cllr Andy Bowden, Cabinet Member, Environment and Transport

Cllr Anthony Burns, Cabinet Member, Wellbeing, Culture and Heritage

Cllr Jeanie Bell, Cabinet Member, Safer, Stronger Communities

Cllr John Hodgkinson, Member Champion for Local Business

Cllr Kate Groucutt, Cabinet Member, Inclusive Economy, Business and Skills

Cllr Marlene Quinn, Cabinet Member, Integrated Care and Health

Cllr Martin Bond, Cabinet Member, Finance and Governance

Cllr Michelle Sweeney, Member Champion for Mental Health

Cllr Nova Charlton, Cabinet Member, Children and Young People

Cllr Richard McCauley, Cabinet Member, Regeneration and Planning

Cllr Seve Gomez-Aspron, Deputy Leader of St Helens Borough Council

Conor McGinn MP, St Helens North

David Reynolds, St Helens Citizens Advice Bureau

Dr David Lawson, Clinical Director, St Helens North PCN

Dr Hilary Flett, Clinical Director for St Helens at NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICS

Emily Hawkins, Mission in the Economy Chaplaincy

Ged Sheridan, Merseyside Fire and Rescue

Hilary Brooks, Director of Children's Services, St Helens Borough Council

Jayne Parkinson-Loftus, Healthwatch St Helens

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Jayne Taylor, Head of Communications, St Helens Borough Council
Jo Morris, The Hope Centre
John Tabern, Chairman of the Town Deal Board
Justin Hill, St Helens YMCA
Kath O'Dwyer, Chief Executive, St Helens Borough Council
Leigh Thompson, Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust
Lisa Harris, Executive Director Place Services, St Helens Borough Council
Marie Rimmer CBE MP, St Helens South and Whiston
Mark Palethorpe, NHS Place Director & Executive Director People, St Helens Borough Council
Nick Dyer, Teardrops Supporting Your Community
Paul Morgan, The Pilkington Family Trust
Rachel Cleal, Director of Adult Social Services, St Helens Borough Council
Reverend Rachel Shuttleworth, St Helens Parish Church
Rob Huntington, Assistant Chief Executive, St Helens Borough Council
Ruth du Plessis, Director of Public Health, St Helens Borough Council
Sally Yeoman, Halton and St Helens Voluntary and Community Action
Sarah Holden, St Helens Wellbeing Service
Simon Pierce, St Helens College
Tracy Mawson, St Helens Chamber of Commerce