

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

8th November 2023

Via e-mail

Dear Chancellor of the Exchequer,

Strengthening our threadbare safety net

We write as a broad, cross-sector coalition of organisations committed to advocating for the people, public services, voluntary organisations and businesses of the North East.

We are deeply concerned by reports the Government may not increase social security payments in line with inflation next April, when we know that our threadbare safety net is already failing to protect North East families – both in and out of work – from poverty, nor even to deliver what should be its most basic function of eradicating destitution.

An increasing number of organisations across our region – whether charities or community organisations, schools or colleges, local authorities or healthcare providers – are now dealing with the impacts of unacceptable levels of hardship on a daily basis. Many are already supporting growing numbers of families to access basic essentials, on a scale that is simply not sustainable when donations are far outstripped by levels of need and already overstretched budgets are at breaking point.

Forcing low income families – who have borne the brunt of the cost of living crisis – to endure yet another real terms cut to their budgets is unthinkable, and would only exacerbate already high levels of child poverty and destitution, the most severe form of material hardship, in the North East.

It would also damage our regional economy, as families have even less money to spend with local businesses. And – when more than half of children and young people growing up in our region are in families receiving Universal Credit or legacy benefits – it would further undermine commitments to ‘level up’ living standards and opportunities in places like ours. Most of these families are in low paid work, or recognised by Government as being unable to work due to disability, ill health or caring responsibilities.

We all know that the North East can be the most fantastic place to grow up and to raise a family – but until it is a place where **every** baby, child and young person is supported to thrive and pursue their ambitions, our region will not be able to fulfil its incredible potential.

We therefore jointly urge you to use your Autumn Statement this month to confirm that social security payments **will** be increased at least by inflation (6.7%) from April – and that you will commit to review the adequacy of this support going forward to ensure it **at least** always covers the cost of household essentials.

Yours sincerely

Michele Deans (Interim Chair, North East Child Poverty Commission)

Mark Almond (Chief Executive, North Tyneside Citizens Advice)

Tracy Armstrong (Chief Officer, Citizens Advice Newcastle)

Liz Blackshaw (Regional Secretary, Northern TUC)

Carol Botten (CEO, VONNE - Voluntary Organisations' Network North East)

Lee Bramley (Chair of Trustees, The Teesside Charity)

Rt Revd Paul Butler (Bishop of Durham)

Steph Capewell (Chief Executive, Love, Amelia)

Abi Conway (CEO, Citizens Advice Northumberland)

Nic Cook (Development Manager, Difference North East)

Michelle Cooper (CEO, County Durham Community Foundation)

Emilie de Bruijn (Chair, Hartlepool Baby Bank)

Lynn Davies (Founding Member, The White Feather Project)

Wayne Dobson (CEO, The Cedarwood Trust)

Steve Duffield (Chair, Footprints in the Community and Redcar Area Foodbank)

Alison Dunn (CEO, Citizens Advice Gateshead)

Graham Easterlow (Chief Executive, East Durham Trust)

Leigh Elliott (Chief Executive, Children North East)

Kevin Franks (Chief Executive, Youth Focus: North East)

Rosie Gilchrist (Founder, Rosie's Corner Kids Bank)

Sam Gilchrist (Manager, West Northumberland Food Bank)

Gill Gray (Senior Partnership & Innovation Officer, Wallsend Children's Community)

Cllr Gary Haley (Chair, North East Regional Lead Members Network for Children's Services)

Amanda Healy (Chair, Association of Directors of Public Health North East)

Tracey Herrington (Manager, Thrive Teesside)

Helen Howson (CEO, Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland)

Fr Chris Hughes (Parish Priest, St Joseph's and St Cuthbert's Parish, North Shields)

Denise Irving (Chief Officer, Citizens Advice Sunderland)

Kate Jeffels (Chief Officer, Together Middlesbrough & Cleveland)

Rita Lawson (Chief Executive, Tees Valley Rural Action)

John McCabe (Chief Executive, North East Chamber of Commerce)

Cath McEvoy-Carr (Chair, Association of Directors of Children's Services North East)

Dr Mike McKean (Health Policy Lead & Exec Member, North East & North Cumbria Child Health & Wellbeing Network)

Beth Major (Chief Executive, The Junction Foundation)
Peter Maloney (Chief Executive, Hospitality and Hope)
Clare Morley (CEO, RISE)
Dr Kate Mukungu (Chief Executive, Riverside Community Health Project)
Helen Mulhearn (Director, Investing in Children)
Margaret Nelson (Area Manager for North East England, The Trussell Trust)
Chris Nicholls (North East Area Director, Association of Colleges)
Edward Pickering (CEO, Citizens Advice County Durham)
Vici Richardson (Chief Executive, Disability North)
Penny Schofield (Chair of Trustees, The Comfrey Project)
Laura Seebohm (Chair, Millfield House Foundation)
David Smith (CEO, Oasis Community Housing)
Gill Smith (CEO, Northern Learning Trust)
Ian Thompson (CEO, South Tyneside Citizens Advice)
David Watson (Headteacher, St Thomas More Catholic High School)
Lesleyann Watson (Project Manager, Gateshead Foodbank)
Richard Young (Chair, Tyneside Welcomes)
Chris Zarraga (Director, Schools North East)