



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

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Your ref: C173/23  
Our ref: MC2023/81569

13 November 2023

Cllr Dominic Molloy  
Mid Ulster District Council  
Burn Road  
Cookstown  
BT80 8DT

RECEIVED BY  
27 NOV 2023

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Dear Dominic,

As you may know your letter of 2 October to the Prime Minister about Government measures to help people with the rising cost of living has been forwarded to this Department. I am replying as the Minister with responsibility for this policy area.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to write in raising this issue. I write to you with the latest update and I hope you will find the following comments to be helpful.

The concerns you have raised in your letter have transferred to Northern Ireland and are the responsibility of the Department for Communities. However, as the Minister responsible for this policy area in Great Britain, I am replying to set out the position in Great Britain.

The Government recognises the pressures people are facing and has acted, providing total support of over £94 billion over 2022/23 and 2023/24 to help households and individuals with the rising cost of living. In April 2023 we uprated benefit rates and State Pensions by 10.1 per cent, as well as increasing benefit cap levels by the same amount.

Universal Credit awards are formed of a Standard Allowance, paid according to age and family status, plus help with eligible housing costs, which can then be supplemented with additional elements for groups recognised as having additional needs, such as parents, disabled people, and carers.

The rates of benefit are not determined by individuals' living costs and so it is not possible to provide a breakdown of these amounts by reference to separate amounts for specific items of expenditure, such as the TV licence, gas, electricity, and food.

The Government firmly believes claimants should be free to spend their benefit as they see fit, in line with their individual needs and preferences. We do not consider it appropriate to introduce changes that would prioritise one particular area of household expenditure over the cost of other essential goods and services.

The Government is committed to a sustainable, long-term approach to tackling poverty and supporting people on lower incomes. In 2023/24 we will spend around £276 billion through the welfare system in Great Britain including £114 billion on people of working age and children.

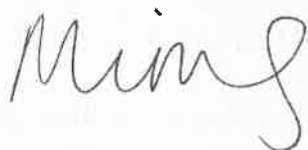
The Government understands the pressures people are facing and are taking action to support them, providing total support of over £94 billion over 2022/23 and 2023/24 to help households and individuals with the rising bills.

Households on eligible means-tested benefits will get up to £900 in Cost of Living Payments, paid in three separate payments of £301, £300, and £299 across the 2023/24 financial year. We have already delivered the first £301 payment to 8.3 million households.

The qualifying period for the second payment of £300 was 18 August to 17 September 2023. Most people who are eligible will be paid between 31 October 2023 and 19 November 2023. As of 3 November, we have already paid 6.4 million households the second Cost of Living Payment, with further payments to be made up until 19 November. There will be a further payment of £299 by Spring 2024 for eligible claimants.

In addition, over six million people across the UK on eligible 'extra costs' disability benefits have been paid a £150 Disability Cost of Living payment and more than eight million pensioner households will receive an additional £300 Cost of Living Payment during Winter 2023/24.

For those who require extra support, the Government is providing an additional £1 billion of funding, including Barnett impact, to enable the extension of the Household Support Fund in England this financial year to continue to provide discretionary support to those most in need with the significantly rising cost of living. It will be for the devolved administrations to decide how to allocate their additional Barnett funding.



**Mims Davies MP**  
**Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression**

**From the Permanent Secretary**  
Dr Denis McMahon

**Your Reference: C200/23**  
**Our Reference: SCORR-0444-2023**

Cllr Dominic Molloy  
Mid Ulster District Council

Via email:  
[Eileen.Forde@midulstercouncil.org](mailto:Eileen.Forde@midulstercouncil.org)

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22 November 2023

Dear Cllr. Molloy

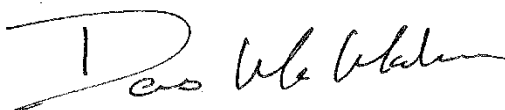
### **HANDLING CORRESPONDENCE IN RELATION TO MAINTENANCE DEFECTS**

Thank you for your email of 2 November 2023 regarding the handling of correspondence in relation to maintenance defects. I appreciate the comments from elected members regarding the hard work and responses of our staff across the range of issues raised.

It is important to stress that it is not the intention of DfI to withdraw from communications with members of the public or elected representatives. There are clearly occasions where concerns that have been raised will benefit from local engagement. However, for those issues requiring more immediate action such as major potholes or fallen trees, the reporting system will allow for the quickest and most effective response to be taken by the Department. The notifications received are checked on a continual basis, with extra staff being made available for monitoring during periods of extreme weather. This preferred approach is designed to provide the best service possible within the resources available and using this system should not result in a lower level of service compared to speaking directly to a staff member.

In these challenging times the Department would be grateful if members of the public and elected representatives, who have access to the internet, report road defects through the DfI online reporting facility provided by NI Direct at: (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/travel-transport-and-roads/problems-roads-and-streets>) rather than by direct correspondence with the Department. Or if in an emergency via telephone to 02890 540540 and reports of Flooding can be directed to the Flooding Incident Line 0300 2000 1000 (24 hours a day).

I hope you find this of assistance and take reassurance that the Department remains committed to providing the best service possible with the resources we have.



**DR DENIS McMAHON**  
**DfI Permanent Secretary**

**From:** [Pauline Wilson](#)  
**To:** [Eileen Forde](#)  
**Subject:** Water Quality in Lough Neagh - Your Ref C172/23  
**Date:** 20 November 2023 17:05:27  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)  
[image004.png](#)  
[image005.png](#)

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Dear Councillor Molloy

I refer to your correspondence of 02<sup>nd</sup> October 2023 in relation to water quality in Lough Neagh. As Lough Neagh is wholly situated in Northern Ireland the Environmental Protection Agency does not have a role in monitoring or assessing water quality in the lake. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency may be able to assist you.

Kind Regards,

**Pauline Wilson**  
PA to Director General  
Office of Director General, Wexford  
PA chuig an Ard-Stiúrthóir  
An Oifig an Ard-Stiúrthóra, Loch Garman



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SR/cd/CS10.10.2023, item 9a

20 November 2023

Mr Adrian McCreesh,  
Chief Executive Mid Ulster Council

chief.exceutive@midulstercouncil.org

Dear Mr McCreesh

At a recent meeting of Ards and North Down Borough Council it was discussed and unanimously agreed to put on record that the Council believes:

- Education should be accessible to all who seek it and embedding a culture of lifelong learning in our society is essential to enabling people to realise their potential.
- Part-time flexible learning is crucial to meeting the skills needed to build a modern, inclusive, and green economy.
- Part-time students are a unique demographic, they are more likely to have disabilities, come from disadvantaged backgrounds, have caring responsibilities, such as children or elderly relatives, and in general, be part of a 'hard to reach' group who missed out on full-time study.
- Lifelong learning, including non-formal education, addresses social issues, strengthens communities, and builds civic engagement. It is the most effective tool for meeting social policy objectives and creating positive social change.
- That lifelong learning must become a meaningful and developed policy area with tangible actions and outcomes, underpinned by the wealth of best practice and innovation from across the UK and Ireland.

As a result, Council agreed:

- To assist in the promotion, through the dissemination of material in support of a Lifelong Learning campaign, to inform and raise public awareness of how lifelong learning transforms lives and communities.
- Write to Strangford and North Down MLAs and MPs to prioritise funding for formal and informal part-time education when the Executive is formed.
- Encourage Strangford and North Down MLAs to form an All-Party Group on Lifelong Learning to support and evidence and best-practice informed approach to policy making, in collaboration with adult education bodies and other



**Ards and  
North Down  
Borough Council**

stakeholders to form a voice for Lifelong Learning in the Assembly when an Executive is formed.

- To write to other Councils in Northern Ireland to take similar action and to write to MPs and MLAs for their respective areas in a similar manner.

I would be grateful if you could please consider this letter and respond accordingly.

Yours sincerely

**Stephen Reid**  
**Chief Executive**

# EQUITY

your ref: C225/23

Reply to: Alice Adams Lemon  
National Official, NI  
[alemon@equity.org.uk](mailto:alemon@equity.org.uk)  
07936 045081

Councillor Dominic Molloy  
Chair, Mid Ulster District Council

By email to: [Eileen.Forde@midulstercouncil.org](mailto:Eileen.Forde@midulstercouncil.org)

1 December 2023

Dear Councillor Molloy

## Equity NI – Resist The Cuts

I write in response to your letter of 27 November 2023, in which you informed me of the Mid-Ulster Council's agreement to calls for a reversal in cuts to the arts and furthermore to agree to join as a signatory to Equity NI's latest open letter to the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Communities.

We thank you for joining an ever-growing list of supporters of our campaign - over 12,500 individuals signed our petition which asked for more investment in the arts, not less; our rally was attended by 250 people; the Department for Communities received over 110 direct mail letters telling them how these cuts would affect individuals and communities who experience inequality.

A growing number of MLAs have pledged publicly to reverse the cuts, Belfast City Council also unanimously voted to co-sign our most recent letter to the Permanent Secretary, and more support comes in every day.

It cannot be acceptable that decisions which threaten to decimate our industry, impacting upon employment, enjoyment and equality, are being taken by un-elected civil servants. It cannot be right that our local Councillors feel the need to step in to fill funding gaps, where they can, from their already limited Council coffers – when there could be more investment in the arts directly from the centre.

We appreciate your support and applaud your decision to join us in our campaign. We will continue to fight until we have more investment in the arts here, not less.

Sincerely,

Lynda Rooke

Lynda Rooke  
**President, Equity**

Cc: Equity Northern Ireland Committee  
Alice Adams Lemon, Equity NI Official

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F: 020 7379 7001  
   @EquityUK  
[equity.org.uk](http://equity.org.uk)

**Equity**  
Independent Trade Union  
Incorporating the Variety Artists'  
Federation Affiliated to the TUC,  
STUC, ICTU and FIA

**President** Lynda Rooke  
**Vice Presidents** Jackie Clune  
**Honorary Treasurer** Bryn Evans  
**General Secretary** Paul W  
Fleming

**Trustees:** Judi Dench,  
Malcom Sinclair, Timothy  
West, Penelope Wilton,  
Johnny Worthy



## Free Portrait of His Majesty The King for Public Authorities

On 1 April 2023, the Cabinet Office issued a [press release](#) to announce a new scheme to allow public authorities across the UK to apply for a free, framed portrait of His Majesty The King to mark the new reign.

The voluntary government funded scheme has now launched throughout the United Kingdom.

The supplier organisation chosen to operate this scheme is Cubiquity Limited. Eligible public authorities can apply for a free portrait using the supplier's link below.

[His Majesty The King's Portrait Scheme URL](#)

All those who fall within scope of the voluntary scheme are welcome to apply and the public authorities who are eligible can request one free framed portrait per authority.

The closing date for applications is **Friday 2nd February 2024**.

Please refer to the [FAQs](#) for any specific questions about the portrait and the scheme itself.

For this scheme, the categories of public authorities in scope are: ministerial and non-ministerial government departments; executive agencies; executive and advisory NDPBs; principal local authorities; maintained schools and education providers (including nurseries and special schools); prisons; courts; police forces; fire and rescue services.

Further details will be provided in due course for public bodies that do not fall within scope of the scheme but wish to purchase a portrait or for public authorities who would like to purchase additional portraits