



Your reference

Our reference: JW/emcm

Date: 10 November 2025

Minister Gordon Lyons  
Department for Communities

By email: Gordon Lyons MLA, [private.office@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:private.office@communities-ni.gov.uk)

Dear Gordon

**Re: Request for Funding to Support the Delivery of a Hardship Programme in 2025/26**

I am writing to request your consideration of funding support for the continuation of the Hardship Programme in the 2025/26 financial year. This request follows direction from our elected members, who remain deeply committed to alleviating the impacts of poverty and hardship on our most vulnerable residents.

As you will be aware, the Department for Communities has previously provided valuable funding in this area, including a Hardship Grant of £724,600 in late 2022/23. Combined with underspends from the Covid Support Grant, this enabled the Council to implement a £1m Hardship Programme for the 2023/24 financial year. In the absence of funding from the Department for 2024/25, the Council demonstrated its ongoing commitment by allocating £1.1m on a one-off basis from VAT receipts, ensuring the programme's delivery despite challenging circumstances.

This sustained investment from Council reflects our dedication to supporting those most affected by the cost-of-living crisis over recent years. The programme has focussed on high-impact initiatives, enhancing the capacity of established organisations to assist key cohorts, including children and families, vulnerable individuals in emergency need, and older people.

The impact of this funding has been substantial. In 2024/25 alone, over 50,000 individuals across Belfast received support through various projects, with resources distributed based on need and evidence indicating strong reach into areas of highest deprivation. A summary of the programme's outcomes and impact is appended to this letter for your reference. Feedback from delivery partners underscores the unprecedented and year-round demand for such assistance, highlighting the programme's critical role in addressing ongoing hardship.

However, the Council faces significant financial pressures, which limit our ability to sustain this level of support independently. Without additional external funding, the scope and impact of any future Hardship Programme would be considerably reduced, potentially leaving many vulnerable residents without essential aid.

Council recognises the support which the Department provides through the Social Supermarket Fund in 25/26. £777,811 is being directed to support 19 social supermarket projects across the city. However, the evidence from delivery of the 24/25 Hardship programme shows that there is a need for additional support through other approaches

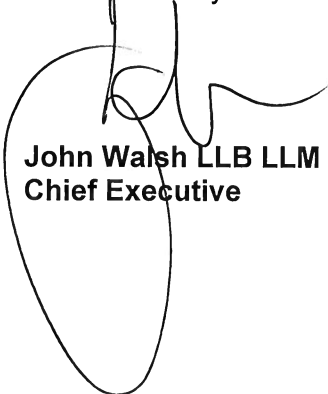
including targeted support for fuel poverty and initiatives focused on specific cohorts such as older people and children and young people.

The department also provides significant funding for a range of advice services across the city which Council also contributes to; these services are crucial in enabling access to independent advice and there is co-ordination across the Hardship, Social Supermarket and Advice programmes to increase the impact of each approach. However, there remains a need to support the most vulnerable in the city through additional support which the Belfast Hardship Programme has successfully provided in previous years.

In light of these challenges, and recognising the budgetary constraints faced by the Department, I kindly request that you and your officials give strong consideration to providing funding for a Hardship Programme in 2025/26. Could you please advise whether a Hardship Grant or similar initiative will be available for this financial year? Additionally, we would welcome exploration of a recurrent multi-year funding model to enable more strategic, long-term efforts in tackling poverty and hardship at the local level. We firmly believe that collaborative working between the Department and local councils will provide better outcomes for our communities.

To allow us to update our elected members I would be grateful if you could respond at your earliest convenience. I would also be pleased to discuss this matter further with you or your team.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Walsh', written over a large, empty oval shape that serves as a placeholder for a stamp or seal.

**John Walsh LLB LLM**  
**Chief Executive**