

From: The Minister

John Walsh
Chief Executive
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS

Via email: WalshJohn@BelfastCity.gov.uk

Dear John

HARDSHIP PROGRAMME 2025/2026

Thank you for your letter of 10 November 2025 requesting consideration of funding support for the continuation of the Hardship Programme in the 2025/26 financial year.

My Department's letter to Council Chief Executives dated 28 March 2023 advised that £4m of hardship funding would be available in 2022/23 to allow councils to provide financial support in 2023/24 to the most vulnerable. Chief Executives were also advised that the funding was non-recurrent; it would not be available in future years; and should be considered additional to any hardship support funding already offered by the Council.

I remain committed to providing services that help people who have fallen on hard times through initiatives such as the Social Supermarket Scheme, Discretionary Support Scheme, Affordable Warmth Scheme as well as the Winter Fuel Payments to those who are eligible.

My Department also continues to provide funding to citizens most in need of support through the benefits system. Anyone facing hardship should be advised to contact Make the Call (telephone 0800 232 1271, text ADVICE to 079 8440 5248 or email makethecall@dfcni.gov.uk) to ensure that they are in receipt of all the benefits they are entitled to.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gordon Lyons".

**Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities**