

27 March, 2023

Dear Church Leaders of Leicester and Leicestershire,

We are writing, as local denominational leaders, to thank you all most sincerely for everything that you have been doing to serve your churches and communities during the cost of living crisis through initiatives such as food banks, community kitchens and warm spaces.

Much of this work has been done ecumenically, and we are encouraged by how, amidst these challenging times, relationships between different churches have grown stronger. Your collaboration and leadership, together with the dedication of your volunteers will have made a huge difference to some of the most vulnerable in our region.

Unfortunately, just because the colder months are behind us does not mean that the cost-of-living crisis is over. Many people who had savings to tide them over this time last year no longer have that cushion. Food banks across the country are at breaking point – with more people relying on them, fewer able to make donations, and many volunteers experiencing burnout. So, as we approach summer, millions of families will be anxious about the prospect of feeding their children for six weeks without school lunches.

Our hope, as denominational leaders, is that churches will find opportunities to work together to provide holiday activities and meals for children in their area. But, like food banks and the voluntary sector more generally, we know that the people in our worshipping communities are not immune from hardship. So, we need continued, strategic and compassionate action from policymakers at every level.

[Recent data](#) on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis showed that 42% of East Midlands residents felt their mental health had worsened as a result, and nearly 2 in 5 couldn't afford to turn the heating on during cold spells. At the same time, oil companies recently reported that their profits have doubled over the last year. At \$32 billion, Shell's profits last year were three times greater than the total GDP of countries like Mauritius, Malawi and Rwanda. As people who follow Jesus, who stood up for the downtrodden and the marginalised, we feel it is our duty to do the same.

We welcome the Government's extension of the energy price cap and household support scheme, both of which would have otherwise come to an end this week. We know Leicester City and Leicestershire County councils will be grateful for the £7 million and £7.4 million they have been granted respectively to support families in need. We also welcome the Secretary of State for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero putting a halt on the forced installation of prepayment meters and for bringing prepayment energy charges in line with those who pay by direct debit.



However, we are asking our local MPs, Council leaders and His Majesty's Government to heed our concerns that:

- Unfair sanctions and deductions from the Department for Work and Pensions are having a severe impact on people's health and finances, forcing people to rely on food banks.
- Farmers are being badly hit by rising costs of energy, fuel, fertiliser and feed, and labour shortages. This hurts both farmers and households in our county, as the fall in production levels will mean continued rises in food prices.
- Rising energy prices may push [between 80 and 140 million more people](#) worldwide into extreme poverty. As well as taking care of our neighbours close-by, the UK Government must also step up efforts to protect and support our global neighbours.

Bishop Martyn, as a member of the House of Lords, tabled questions about the Government's response to the cost-of-living crisis. The responses show that [nearly 3 out of 10 people](#) in Leicester eligible for the Energy Support Scheme have not redeemed their vouchers. We were also disappointed to learn that the Government is planning no evaluation of the impact of the various household support schemes delivered by local authorities across the UK. This means we cannot know how effective they have been at protecting people from falling into deep poverty, or suffering related harms to their health and wellbeing.

We would therefore welcome a chance to discuss with our local MPs and council leaders how they will be driving further take-up of the Energy Support Scheme vouchers and assessing the reach and impact of their household support schemes relative to those delivered by other local authorities.

Again, please accept our deepest thanks for your efforts, and we hope you will join with us in praying for wisdom and compassion for our policymakers and leaders, for those affected by the cost of living crisis, and for continued cooperation between Christians so that we might be a beacon of hope in bleak circumstances.

Every Blessing,

The Rt Revd Martyn Snow, Bishop of Leicester (Convenor of the Denominational Church Leaders Group of Churches Together in Leicestershire), Church of England

Revd Mark Clay, Regional Team Leader, East Midland Baptist Association

The Rt Revd Monsignor Patrick McKinney, Roman Catholic Bishop of Nottingham.

The Rt Revd Saju Muthalaly, Bishop of Loughborough, Church of England

Revd Dr Rob Hunter, Congregational Federation

Mrs Marlies Adam, The Lutheran Church of Great Britain

Revd Canon Helen Cameron, Chair of District, Methodist Church



Anthony Gimpel, The Religious Society of Friends
Major Mark Rose, East Midlands Divisional Commander, Salvation Army
Revd Geoffrey Clarke, Moderator, East Midlands Synod, United Reformed Church
Revd Martin Ferris, Chair of Churches Together in Leicestershire Enabling Group, United Reformed Church