

CSAN Statement on the Autumn Statement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer presented to Parliament on 17 November 2022.

On Thursday 17 November, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, presented his Autumn Statement to Parliament. This came just under two months after the government's disastrous mini budget on 23 September, which caused market turmoil with a plan to redistribute wealth to the already wealthy at a time when many were being dragged into poverty by a cost-of-living crisis.

The Autumn Statement is more responsible and measured, with a fairer approach to redistribution, but raises profound questions about the quality of life in the UK and the state of our public services for years to come. Extra funding for health and education is welcome, although it is modest. The most concerning aspect of the approach to public spending is that the most difficult decisions regarding cuts have been put off until 2025, after the next election.

The uprating of benefits in line with inflation, which we called for in our cost-of-living campaign (1) is welcome. However, this uprating is not timely, coming into effect in April 2023. In the meantime, many people relying on benefits will struggle this winter to bridge the gap between their needs and what they receive, with inflation at a 40-year high and energy prices rising steeply. We call on the government to uprate benefits in line with inflation immediately.

We are disappointed that no consideration was given to the removal of the two-child cap on universal credit payments, one of the 'asks' of the Bishops' Conference's Department for Social Justice briefing paper (2) and the CSAN cost-of-living campaign. This is unfair on larger families and should be removed, or at the very least suspended pending a review of its impact.

We are also deeply concerned that the long-awaited social care reforms, a 2019 Conservative Manifesto pledge, will not now be implemented next year as planned. Andrew Dilnot, who drew up the plans for reform, commented, "Without these reforms, individuals and families facing the possibility of long social care journeys are left entirely on their own, with the state only helping once their assets – including their homes – have dwindled down to the threshold" (3). We call on the government to honour their pledge to "fix social care" without delay.

The extent of the poverty in our country remains a scandal. In a recent report, the Trussell Trust (4) revealed that 1300 foodbanks across the UK had given out 1.3 million emergency food parcels between 1 April and 30 September this year, an increase of 50% on pre-pandemic levels. This "tsunami of need" as they describe it has put charities at breaking point as they try to respond with diminishing resources.

Patrick O'Dowd, the Director of Caritas Salford, said recently: "Research from the University of Loughborough highlighted that about 228,000 children, we believe, living in Salford diocese are living in poverty. And that's as high as about 42% of children in Manchester, one of the biggest, most populated areas in the city" (5). Patrick highlighted how Caritas Salford was working with other Catholic charities and CSAN members, such as the SVP and Out There, to meet the extraordinary level of need.

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The economic outlook is bleak. Paul Johnson, the Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, commented that, “The truth is we just got a lot poorer. We are in for a long, hard, unpleasant journey; a journey that has been made more arduous than it might have been by a series of economic own goals” (6).

The fifty-four member charities of Caritas Social Action Network (7) stand in solidarity with those who experience various forms of poverty which prevent human flourishing. We are inspired by our Gospel mandate to proclaim good news to the poor and to build up God’s kingdom of justice, peace and love. We are committed not only to meeting the humanitarian needs of the present time but also, as Pope Francis said, “to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor” (8).

We call upon the Catholic community to write to their MP to amplify our ‘asks’ of the government, revised in the light of the Autumn Statement, to describe the reality of poverty in their community and to share the good news of what the Catholic community is doing to meet this urgent need.

- (1) More information on the CSAN Cost-of-Living campaign, including an invitation to write to your local MP, can be found here: <https://www.csan.org.uk/cost-of-living-crisis/>
- (2) The full Briefing Paper from the Bishops’ Conference Department for Social Justice can be found here: <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/briefing-cost-of-living-crisis/>.
- (3) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/nov/17/delaying-social-care-reforms-jeremy-hunt-uk-vulnerable>
- (4) <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2022/11/10/almost-1-3-million-emergency-parcels-provided-to-people-across-uk-experiencing-hunger-over-past-six-months-as-cost-of-living-emergency-drives-tsunami-of-need-to-food-banks/>
- (5) <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/caritas-salford-at-forefront-of-catholic-response-to-cost-of-living-crisis/>
- (6) <https://ifs.org.uk/collections/autumn-statement-2022>
- (7) <https://www.csan.org.uk/member/>
- (8) Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 188

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