

Level 9

Causeway Exchange

1-7 Bedford Street

Belfast

BT2 7EG

Telephone: **Irrelevant & Sensitive**

e-mail: private.office@communities-ni.gov.uk

Our ref: SUB 1230 2020

FROM: MINISTER FOR COMMUNITIES

DATE: 26 MARCH 2020

TO: FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

REQUEST FOR A DECISION BY URGENT PROCEDURE - THE DISCRETIONARY SUPPORT (AMENDMENT No. 2) (COVID-19) REGULATIONS (NI) 2020

I wish to seek your agreement in accordance with paragraph 2.14 of the Ministerial Code that I take an urgent decision to make The Discretionary Support (Amendment No. 2) (COVID-19) Regulations (NI) 2020.

These regulations will amend the current Discretionary Support legislation as a response to the public health emergency currently unfolding, the Covid-19 Coronavirus.

The Discretionary Support Scheme is a Northern Ireland specific form of financial assistance that aims to provide short-term support to people in an extreme, exceptional or crisis situation that presents a significant risk to the health, safety or well-being of the person or a member of the person's immediate family.

I propose to make legislation that will allow additional support to be provided to those people who may be impacted by the Covid-19 Coronavirus and who also meet the current Discretionary Support eligibility criteria.

The amendment regulations will allow for the Income Threshold to be increased to £20,405 from 1 April 2020 rather than £18,137, which will be the prescribed limit under the current legislation. The increased threshold will more closely align with the maximum amount of social security benefits that are payable under the Benefit Cap. It

will also ensure that more people on low income can access emergency financial support.

The regulations are subject to the draft affirmative resolution procedure of the Assembly and the Executive's agreement is also required. I have written to Executive colleagues and provided them with the regulations and a supporting paper to seek their agreement.

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Due to the nature of this public health emergency I am obliged to invoke the use of the urgent written procedure in this circumstance.

Yours sincerely,

Personal Data

DEIRDRE HARGEY MLA MINISTER FOR COMMUNITIES

