

Presentation to Executive's Covid-19 Crisis Management Committee

Support to Vulnerable People and Communities

24th March 2020



Summary of Support from Department for Communities

1. Flexible delivery of social security benefits, including payment of new claims.
2. Housing Support Services to protect homeless people and the most vulnerable.
3. Role of Voluntary and Community Sector including Community Contingency Fund

Flexible delivery of social security benefits, including assessment of new claims.

Priority to maintain delivery of welfare benefits to new and existing customers and protect the most vulnerable in society.

- Increased demands for working age benefits, including ESA and JSA.
- Over 10,000 new claims for Universal Credit in w/c 16th March (up from 1800 in previous week).
- 120% increase in volume of calls to Make the Call service.
- We are working with DWP to introduce emergency legislation to remove the minimum income floor for UC and provide an increase in the standard allowance for all claimants.
- Discretionary Support payments available to those receiving benefits or in low-paid employment (up to £18,137 from April 2020).
- Plans to suspend all reviews and re-assessments for 3 months for health and disability benefits, including PIP.
- All awards of disability benefits due to end will be extended for up to 6 months.

Housing Support Services

Homelessness

- Liaising with DoH to deliver effective protection to homeless.
- Guidance issued to all hostel providers.

Private Rented Sector

- Exploring proposals to avoid evictions including notice to quit period.
- NIHE and Housing Associations committed to supporting tenants in difficulty with payment of rents.

Supporting People

- Liaison with NIHE to free up capacity for contingency arrangements for vulnerable people.
- £150k funding provided to support Homelessness, young people out of care and older people in combatting Covid-19.

Role of Voluntary and Community Sector

- Covid-19 Voluntary & Community Sector Leadership Group established to set direction for the sector and ensure a collective response.
- Priority for DfC to sustain existing capacity in VCS and maintain service delivery.
- Will extend contracts to VCS to ensure continuation of essential services from 1st April.
- Launch of Covid-19 Community Contingency Fund to support additional services in protecting vulnerable people and communities. This will include:
 - Local community-based delivery, through district councils, with criteria around Food/Financial Need, Poverty and Connectivity;
 - Regional element to support community infrastructure and innovation; and
 - Match funding of £200k to Community Foundation NI's Coronavirus Community Fund to target food distribution, health and isolation issues.
- Working with key stakeholders across public, voluntary/community and private sectors to address food provision/delivery issues for most vulnerable.