# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **The Welsh Government’s response to the Report by the Wales Expert Group on the Cost-of-Living Crisis** |
| **DATE**  | **23 January 2024**  |
| **BY** | **Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip** |

In 2022, the Welsh Government asked a group of 18 experts, from a range of organisations, to advise the Cabinet Sub-Committee on the Cost-of-Living about the impact of the crisis and to devise a set of immediate, medium and long-term actions, which could be adopted to mitigate those impacts.

I am extremely grateful for the expert group’s work. I published the summary report and recommendations on 26 September 2023. Today, as I am publishing the Welsh Government’s new Child Poverty Strategy, I am setting out our approach to the recommendations which fall to us.

I am very pleased the Child Poverty Strategy takes forward a number of the expert group’s recommendations, particularly the immediate recommendation relating to maximising people’s income and the longer-term recommendation to align of our cost-of-living work with wider anti-poverty initiatives and actions.

We have taken immediate action in response to many of the recommendations where the expert group said swift action would help benefit people in Wales during this ongoing cost-of living crisis. We are:

* Publishing the Welsh Benefit Charter, endorsed by the WLGA and all 22 Local Authorities.
* Reviewing the current water social tariff guidance and we continue to press the UK Government to introduce a social tariff for energy and to do more on protecting those on Pre-payment meters.
* Continuing the roll out of free school meals in all primary schools in Wales as part of the Co-operation Agreement – more than 15m additional free school meals have been served since the launch in September 2022
* Committed to growing the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP). In the school summer holidays in 2023, 265 schools took part in 175 SHEP schemes providing 11,100 places for children each operating day.
* Extending the Nest scheme as we procure the new Warm Homes scheme for April 2024.
* Calling on the UK Government to increase Local Housing Allowance rates to be set at the 50th percentile.
* Protecting funding for the Discretionary Assistance Fund and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, in the face of an exceptionally difficult financial climate.

We are committed to doing everything we can to support people through the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, to mitigate the worst of its impacts, but also through the action we take to prevent people from experiencing poverty in the first place. This includes our [Here to help](https://www.gov.wales/here-help-cost-living) - "Claim What’s Yours” campaigns and our advice services under the Single Advice Fund, our fuel Pre-payment vouchers, our support for emergency food aid and the Discretionary Assistance Fund, which provides emergency support for those in crisis.

But the extraordinarily difficult financial climate means we have had to take some extremely stark and painful decisions so we can we target our spending towards protecting public services and those at greatest need.

This means there are a number of recommendations, all involving significant funding commitments, which we will not be able to take forward currently because of the severe constraints on our budget in 2023-24 and 2024-25, and which will only be realised if significant additional funding becomes available.

We will however continue to explore these opportunities if the funding situation changes.