Dear

Happy Christmas.

I am writing to you as a person who has needed to attend a Warm Space in your constituency in recent weeks.

The Energy Price Guarantee announced on 8th September, whilst welcome, hasn’t gone far enough and the Autumn Budget statement by the Chancellor on the 17th November did very little to allay fears about how people are going to cope this winter. Recent research by Prof Donald Hirsch indicates that the average family of four receiving Universal Credit will still need an additional £1,391 over the next six months to stay warm and fed. Low income households need targeted financial support which takes into account family size and need, is distributed quickly and in amounts large enough to enable families to live decently this winter and beyond. The OBR have predicted a 7% drop in the standard of living in this country over the next 2 years which is a bigger drop than at any time in the last 70 years!

In the North East we are also aware that the increased demand for Foodbanks and increase in attendance at community pantries and larders is a sign that people are struggling despite some of the finance measures out in place by Government. On 10th November the Trussell Trust reported that 1.3 million food parcels had been given out in the last 6 months alone, a third higher demand than the same period in 2021 and 50% higher than pre-pandemic levels. 1 in 5 of these people are from working households. The demand for Foodbanks is rising again with people so concerned about how they will pay their energy bills.

Most churches around the country will be lighting candles throughout advent and the first Sunday in Advent is often associated with the theme of Hope, however many people who attend Warm Spaces feel increasingly hope-less and may need to rely on candles this winter to light their homes, and in some cases use them to heat their home too. This is unacceptable. Whilst community organisations will provide support in the coming weeks and months this is not a solution to a longer term problem. Therefore as one of your constituents I am asking you to continue to speak up on this issue so we can seek Hope for those of us wo are increasingly vulnerable in our communities due to rising energy and cost of living prices. In a time of political upheaval and rapid change, the most vulnerable in our communities need consistency and some certainty about what help they can expect to receive this winter.

So, please accept this candle as a symbol of Advent Hope that the most vulnerable in our communities will receive the help they need to ensure they do not fall into deeper poverty or destitution now and in the future.

Yours sincerely,