



Responding to the Chancellor's Budget Statement, the Bishop of Birmingham, the Rt Revd David Urquhart, Convenor of the Bishops in the House of Lords, said:

As we begin to consider what the UK outside the EU will look like, we need to commit to policies that will promote healing over further division, care for the environment, a bias for social justice and a renewed focus on the most vulnerable.

I recognise the dilemma of balancing the need to reduce national debt and the deficit while ensuring there is proper targeted support and investment where it is most needed.

Addressing the developing crisis in social care funding has to be central to that, so I am encouraged by the Chancellor's announcement of £2 billion over three years, but as the Chancellor himself said this needs to be placed on a more sustainable footing. I therefore look forward to the Green Paper in the autumn, to which the Church of England will no doubt respond.

The priority for an improving school system should be to ensure that this is made possible for each person, no matter the circumstances into which they are born or the struggles they may face as learners. The Church's fundamental commitment in providing schools is that every pupil should be enabled to flourish, whatever their background. I welcome the announcement of extra funding for technical education and the proposed T-level which should give a fresh emphasis to equipping young people with the technical skills our society needs.

Investment in infrastructure and creating a climate where businesses can thrive is welcome and will help to insure us against shocks to the economy that EU withdrawal might yet bring. Supporting small independent businesses is vital to our economy and I will look closely at the steps the Chancellor has announced to alleviate the impact of the business rates rise.

A bias towards justice must mean that the fruits of any economic upturn are felt first by those who are most struggling. As research from a number of national charities has shown, a combination of benefit freezes and a rising cost of living is putting pressure on living standards and an increase in child poverty for those already on the margins, with more families facing the prospect of having to prioritise debt repayment over family essentials. I welcome the continuing rise in employment levels but remain concerned about levels of in-work poverty.

Churches, charities and civil society have a key role to play alongside Government in helping to alleviate these problems, but a safety net needs to be well maintained. I am concerned by reports from the Charities Aid Foundation that nearly one in five charities report they are struggling to survive, rising to a quarter for smaller charities. Though not mentioned by the Chancellor in his speech, the doubling of the rate of Insurance Premium Tax over the past 18 months is just one area that Government might re-examine, given the disproportionate impact it has on charities and churches.

The House of Lords will debate the Budget statement next week and bishops will respond in further detail then.

Notes

The Bishop of Birmingham, Rt. Revd David Urquhart, is Convenor of the Bishops in the House of Lords and is their lead on economic and financial policy matters. He also serves on the House of Lords Select Committee on Financial Exclusion.

The House of Lords will debate the detail of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on Tuesday 14th March. The Bishop of Chester is expected to take part in the debate.

See recent research from:

- [The Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)
- [The Children's Society](#)
- [End Child Poverty Coalition](#)
- [Charities Aid Foundation](#)
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