

Responding today to the Chancellor's Budget Statement, the Bishop of Birmingham, Rt. Revd David Urquhart, Convenor of the Lords Spiritual, said:

"I do not envy the Chancellor the task he faced today and our prayers are with him.

"The bishops of the Church of England have made no secret of our concern about global tech giants getting away with paying less than their fair share of tax.

"So we welcome the Chancellor's initial steps to placing the UK in the vanguard through a digital services tax while working for a global agreement to tackle this challenge.

"We are deeply disappointed, however, by the delay in implementing the reduction in minimum stakes on Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs).

"We have seen increases in the use of church-run food banks in areas where Universal Credit has been rolled out for more than a year, as well as rising debt, destitution and hunger.

"Bishops have long supported the principle of Universal Credit but made clear that it is essential that it is adequately funded.

"We therefore welcome the decision to reverse the cut in work allowances to help low income working families and the additional support for those moving onto the new benefit.

"We hope that this goes some way towards addressing the hardships experienced by many people struggling with the implementation of Universal Credit.

"But we regret that the Government appears not to have reconsidered its two-child limit policy. This policy is having a negative impact on family life and, if not reversed, will drive up child poverty.

"We are also pleased to see a rise in the National Living Wage and the extra funding for mental health services.

"While the additional funding for 'extras' for schools is welcome, it remains the case that schools are under substantial financial pressure. They need the resources to provide a rich, broad and deep curriculum that promotes wisdom, knowledge and skills across the disciplines.

"The plan announced today to limit and tax the use of plastic in the medium term is a step in the right direction to protecting the long-term future of God's planet but we would urge concrete action as quickly as possible.

"We are entering a period of deep political and economic uncertainty.

"Our prayers are with all those charged with seeing our country through the final stages of the negotiating period leading up to our departure from the European Union.

"It is essential now to get the best deal in the national interest, keeping in sight the needs of all those experiencing hardship, whose position could be made even more precarious should we encounter economic difficulties."