

The cost of living emergency continues to dominate debate at the council, just like it does in many households and businesses. Speaking to partner agencies, what's really worrying is not just that more and more families are struggling but that the organisations meant to support people are also finding times increasingly difficult.

Churches, foodbanks, the council, small businesses, charities – all have to pay energy bills and are all affected by rising inflation too.

But we're all determined to do everything we can to help, and this week representatives from our local public, private, faith and voluntary sectors have joined forces to write to the Chancellor asking for support to tackle the cost of living crisis and for fair funding for essential services.

The letter is signed by a range of groups including the Chamber, the YMCA, Citizens Advice, St Helens College, headteacher representatives, churches, Healthwatch, the NHS, our MPs, Teardrops, the Hope Centre, the Council and more.

The letter – which you can read in full at sthelens.gov.uk/sthelenstogether – is a powerful statement. I know some people are weary of the Council or Labour politicians talking about cuts and austerity, so the fact that so many other organisations are facing the same issues and saying the same thing speaks volumes.

With local organisations we're also working together to provide 'warm banks' for people to access over the coming months, and we're continuing to ask residents, if they're able to do so, to make food and essential item donations at a number of sites in the borough or to make a donation via text: texting FEEDSTHELENS to 70085 will donate £2, and if you can afford to donate more add the amount as well - for example, to donate £20 text FEEDSTHELENS £20.

Every penny raised will go to local food pantries, food banks and community cafes supporting people directly.

The current situation is urgent and unprecedented in our lifetimes, and I thank all those who signed the letter and all those who are joining the call and standing up for St Helens. Our message is simple – let's really level up! Let's hope the Government listen to our plea.

If you would like advice or support with your energy bills, council tax or other household finances, please visit www.sthelens.gov.uk/sthelenstogether for all the latest information, advice and support.

Best wishes to all Star readers.