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**REACH Examines the Chancellor’s Budget**

*Reach Community Projects, based in Haverhill, Suffolk, has immediately set about examining the Chancellor’s Budget as soon as it was announced in the House of Commons today.*

Today the Chancellor of the Exchequer has delivered his Budget and the well known Haverhill charity, Reach Community Projects (REACH), has been one of the first in the local community to examine its contents and to try to understand what it means for those families and individuals for whom REACH has much concern.

REACH is no stranger to the difficulties of balancing a budget, as an increasing number of people in hardship find themselves with little room for manoeuvre and nowhere to go in making more savings in order to pay for essentials.

Although the Chancellor’s long term wishes are for a lower tax economy, short term personal tax reductions have little impact on those on the lowest incomes and it is therefore towards the provision of services that REACH makes its focus in assessing the impact of the Budget on those most in need.

For those in low paid or no employment the benefits system provides a vital safety net preventing the further fall into destitution in its various guises of hunger, homelessness, illness (both physical and mental) and despair. Such benefits are provided through both central and local government and, as has been reported widely recently, the latter is also experiencing great strains in its ability to balance the books.

One key example of how benefits have meant survival for many, for whom budgeting is no longer meaningful, is the Household Support Fund (HSF) which is granted by central government to local authorities to fight crisis and emergency hardship situations. But the HSF, which in this current financial year is running at a total of £1 billion, was set to end on 31st March. REACH is therefore relieved to hear that it will be extended for another 6 months, and are very keen to discover if this will continue into the latter part of the year or be replaced with some other form of vital support.

Speaking as the Chancellor sat down in the House of Commons following his Budget speech, Henry Wilson MBE, REACH’s CEO said “I have always maintained that the mark of a civilised nation is the extent to which it takes care of its most vulnerable and hardest pressed citizens both in good times and in bad. We have certainly been through some very difficult times in recent years and the cost of living crisis is far from over. I really do hope, therefore, that there are things within this Budget and public expenditure details to come that can give more than just a dream to so many, who REACH witnesses on a daily basis to be in dire financial crisis”.

As part of its ongoing Prevention Programme, REACH is very active in the community teaching and explaining the household budgeting process from school age upwards. The degree of success of this will be determined in the future but, right now, REACH is engaging with politicians, both central and local, to demonstrate how prevention and benefits are two sides of the same coin.

Henry Wilson MBE continued “While we all wish for a thriving economy, I very much hope that those now in power, as well as those seeking power in this election year, do realise the necessity and value of provision of essentials for the most needy and, in fact, I hold out an open invitation to the current Chancellor, as well as to those aspiring to be Chancellor, to come along to REACH for first hand experience of budgeting at its most basic level”.

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*REACH Community Projects (registered charity 1169108) was founded in 2010 by Henry Wilson MBE, a lifelong resident of Haverhill. The charity aims to relieve and prevent financial hardship whilst tackling the causes. As well as operating a foodbank (part of the Trussell Trust national network) and providing emergency aid (help with utilities, basic bedding, and kitchenware through partnerships with other organisations), REACH works longer term with clients to help them rise above and out of their crisis. This includes offering debt and budgeting advice (Reach is part of the Community Money Advice network), signposting clients to other appropriate support (help with mental health, homelessness, legal advice etc.) and supporting clients in other ways including helping them to complete forms, apply for jobs, accompanying them to court hearings and more.*

*For further information, contact Emma Wilkins, Communications Team Leader, REACH Community Projects.*