

From the Permanent Secretary
Katrina Godfrey



Our reference: SCORR-0386-2023

Mr Patrick Brown MLA
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Via email:
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25 September 2023

Dear Patrick

AVAILABILITY OF FUNDING FROM DAERA FOR COUNCILS FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

Thank you for your email of 31 August 2023 and for taking the time to express your disappointment that the Department is not in a position this year to continue to provide funding to help councils discharge their statutory obligations in relation to companion animal welfare services.

As you will know from the party briefings we have offered on the DAERA budget, determining how to allocate the reduced non-earmarked resource budget provided to the Department has been a very difficult task, especially in a context where inflation and other factors mean that it is costing significantly more to deliver our statutory and contractual obligations than in previous years. Indeed, as the year progresses it continues to be a very real challenge to ensure that we are delivering those obligations within the non-earmarked budgets allocated to us.

In such a difficult scenario, it has simply not proved possible for us also to provide funding and support councils to discharge their statutory responsibilities during 2023-24. I have however given council colleagues a commitment that we will keep the position under review and will look again at the possibility of financial assistance for councils if the budgetary position changes in the months ahead.

As Accounting Officer, I carry responsibility for ensuring that the Department lives within the budget allocated to it, a responsibility that continues to be stressed to me by both the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Finance and one that I am committed to discharging, even though it requires difficult decisions to be made. Those decisions were indeed informed by equality screening and also by the application of the Secretary of State's guidance on decision-making.

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In that context, I was concerned to read in your email that you considered our decision-making process to be “cynical”. As I have noted above, officials are being required to take very difficult decisions to balance budgets and, within DAERA, I and my team continue to work very hard to do so in a manner that fully reflects the statutory obligations placed on us and our Code of Ethics.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katrina Godfrey". The signature is written in a cursive style and is contained within a light grey rectangular box.

KATRINA GODFREY

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