



WBR Chamber of Commerce  
44 Church Street  
Warrenpoint  
Co. Down  
BT34 3HN

16<sup>th</sup> September 2022

### **To Our Elected MLAs**

WBR Chamber of Commerce represents the businesses within the Warrenpoint, Burren and Rostrevor areas. Our members have raised numerous concerns around the on-going cost of energy and the lack of any meaningful intervention by MLAs in South Down, and indeed across Northern Ireland.

As you will be aware, all of the main energy suppliers in Northern Ireland have, with the consent of the Utility Regulator, introduced numerous increases to the unit cost of electricity and gas over the last number of months. Most recently, Firmus has increased its prices by 56.3% which brings the average combined gas and electric bill for consumers in the Ten Towns area to over £3,000 per year<sup>1</sup>.

The increase in power costs for many businesses is now completely unsustainable. Many of our members are now receiving bills in excess of 300% what they paid for the equivalent period last year. With winter approaching, when consumption is only going to increase, many are questioning the viability of their business.

The vast majority of our members are small, family run businesses. These increased costs are not eating into already large profits or the potential to pay shareholder dividends. Rather, they are placing pressure on these small business owners ability to pay their mortgage, buy groceries and, indeed, to pay for their home energy usage.

These small businesses are the backbone of our local economy and the economy of Northern Ireland. SME's account for 89% of all businesses in Northern Ireland<sup>2</sup>, and employ around one-third of the total workforce<sup>3</sup>. Rising energy costs not only put these businesses at risk, but also the livelihood of the hundreds of thousands of people employed by them.

Whilst the root cause of these rocketing energy prices is beyond the control of the Assembly, there has been a fundamental lack of action in support of businesses by the Assembly. Whilst Liz Truss has announced support for Northern Ireland (that has yet to be quantified), the Assembly

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uregni.gov.uk/news-centre/utility-regulator-comments-firmus-energys-regulated-gas-tariff-increase-2>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/news/northern-ireland-business-activity-size-location-and-ownership-2022>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/quarterly-employment-survey-supplementary-tables-june-2022>



members have, at best, released statements to the effect of “something needs to be done”, with no further details or statements that bear any resemblance to a plan of action, whilst others have remained silent.

To that end, we would request that South Down MLAs now engage with the businesses of the area. Our members do not feel like they have been heard on this matter. Nor do they feel that the MLAs which they voted for care about the difficulties they face. Worst of all however, they do not have any faith that our elected representatives will do anything to help them.

With that in mind, we would like to invite all five of MLAs to meet with the businesses of Warrenpoint, Burren and Rostrevor to discuss how we can work together to get through these incredibly challenging and anxious times. We can arrange a date and time to suit all but need a willingness on your part to meet in the first instance and then, to take action on our behalf.

We look forward to hearing from you.

The members of WBR Chamber of Commerce