



The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

6th October 2021

Dear Prime Minister

RE: Urgent call to reinstate £20 to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit and to prioritise income-based solutions to growing poverty

CC: Nicola Sturgeon MSP, Mark Drayford MS, Paul Givan MLA, Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, Rishi Sunak MP, George Eustice MP, Michael Gove MP

The UK-wide Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) represents over 500 independent food banks as well as other emergency food aid providers supporting ever-increasing numbers of people unable to afford food.

The reasons behind rising food bank use pre-pandemic are well-documented - these include lengthy Universal Credit waiting time, social security payments insufficient to meet living costs, benefit deductions, sanctions, inadequate wages, and No Recourse to Public Funds status. Food bank use had already reached record levels before the huge increases we saw in 2020 during the pandemic. The Department of Work and Pensions' Family Resources Survey found that in the year before the onset of Covid-19, 43% of UK households on Universal Credit were food insecure.

As of today, millions of people on Universal Credit will see their payments fall in the biggest ever overnight cut to social security. The numbers of people needing emergency food aid will inevitably grow as a result. On top of this devastating cut in people's incomes, energy and food prices are rising sharply, increasing the need for emergency food support yet further.

Over the past decade, and increasingly through the pandemic, independent food bank teams within our network have worked tirelessly in extremely challenging circumstances to support hundreds of thousands of people in communities across the UK. Their priority has been to ensure emergency food parcels reach adults and children who would otherwise go hungry because they are unable to afford the bare essentials. Many food bank teams are

exhausted, and volunteer numbers have dropped. Volunteers and food bank staff are already stretched with the current levels of need.

In recent weeks, independent food banks in our network have reported food supply shortages. Some are unable to buy food in bulk, food surplus supplies are running dry, and public donation levels have dropped. Independent food banks are running out of options just as a further surge in demand for emergency food aid has started.

At this moment of crisis, the need for a robust social security safety net and adequate wages couldn't be more urgent. The devastating long-term impact of poverty is well documented. Cutting back our social security system and allowing low wages and insecure work to become the norm will inevitably lead to increasing health inequalities at a cost to society as whole.

The £500 million Household Support Fund cannot possibly replace the £6 billion needed for direct Universal Credit payments right now, or the billions cut from our social security system over the last decade.

We urge the Government to reinstate the £20 to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit and to increase legacy benefits to the same level as soon as possible. Urgent improvements also need to be made to the social security system in general. It is fundamental that the 5-week wait for Universal Credit, benefit cap, and two-child limit are removed. No Recourse to Public Funds status needs to be permanently suspended, and a Real Living Wage must be the norm to bring people's incomes to levels that match the cost of living. The New Economic Foundation's plan for a Living Income would guarantee that everyone has enough income to live in dignity, whether in or out of work.

As the winter approaches, there is a real danger that our member food banks will run out of options to support the people in need in their communities. We fear that if immediate action is not taken to prioritise raising income levels across the UK, then more and more people will be faced with impossible choices over heating or eating and will fall into poverty and destitution.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Sabine Goodwin on behalf of the Independent Food Aid Network

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