

Government must keep UC and WTC uplift!

Stephen Lambert

There's a pressing case for the Government to retain the £20 increase to Universal Credit (UC) and Working Tax Credit (WTC). This has been a lifeline to thousands of households across the Northeast struggling to afford basic essentials. Charities, teachers, healthcare professionals and foodbanks across the region are backing the 'Keep the lifeline' campaign and calling on the Government to keep it in place beyond October.

At the start of the pandemic, the Government recognised that UC and WTC didn't pay enough to cover necessities. The extra £20 a week has helped millions keep their heads above water. In Newcastle COVID saw the numbers on out-of-work benefits soar from 9,330 in 2019 to 15,610 in July 2020. Four out of ten people on UC are in low-paid work. The planned £86 a month cut to UC and WTC payments is a devastating blow for millions of low-income families.

The NE Child Poverty Commission notes that 4.3m children (31 per cent across the UK) are living in poverty. Newcastle has 41 per cent of youngsters in poverty - up 13 per cent from 2015. Decades of research have shown a link between poverty and educational attainment. Trussell Trust research found that the equivalent of more than a million people claiming UC say they are very likely to need to use a food bank if the cut goes ahead. People whose only option is to either feed their kids or heat their homes will be affected most.

Food banks city-wide are playing a key role in mitigating the impact of food poverty and insecurity. Nationally the foodbank network distributed over 2.5m food parcels in 2020-21. Over the same period Newcastle foodbanks issued 19,000 food parcels. This number is likely to rise sharply if the cut is implemented, plunging many into destitution.

There's substantial public support for retaining the £20 a week. The Government need to keep this payment and deliver a social security system that enables people to afford essentials like food.



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