

7 October 2021

Dear Prime Minister

I am writing to you today in order to ask you to reconsider what is sure to be a disastrous policy – the cut in Universal Credit. As a local Citizens Advice office, we know first-hand that the £20 uplift in Universal Credit has been a real lifeline for claimants over the past 18 months. Put simply, to remove this now, just as the economic impacts of COVID-19 are truly starting to set in, would be both socially and economically irresponsible.

Tina, one of our clients from Sheerness-on-sea, is in receipt of Universal Credit and is deeply concerned that when this uplift ends she will not have enough money to pay all of her bills as well as feed her family. Tina's situation is not one that is uncommon among Universal Credit claimants. According to our data, this cut will pull 2.3 million people into debt and 800,000 below the poverty line. This is not the sort of policy that any responsible government should be pursuing.

But, of course, the damaging effect of this cut is not to be viewed in isolation. It is due to occur just as the furlough system comes to an end; just as inflation is on the rise; just as gas prices are due to rise by an unprecedented amount; just as the colder weather sets in, which naturally necessitates higher energy usage; and, in just a few months' time, a rise in National Insurance. For Universal Credit claimants that were already on the brink, this really is the perfect storm. For many, it could mean financial ruin.

Yet it is also the case that it is not just Universal Credit claimants that will suffer as a result of this cut. Every pound that is taken from the hands of Universal Credit claimants is a pound that is not being spent in local supermarkets, greengrocers, cafés and other small businesses. In Swale alone, this cut will take hundreds of thousands of pounds from the local economy, the effects of which will be felt by each and every resident.

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Often, we are told that the best solution to these problems is either to get into work, or to work more. This simply is not the case. Across this country, 40% of Universal Credit claimants are already in work. They are in work and are working as best as they can in their individual circumstances. It is not correct to say that this cut in Universal Credit can be made up simply by taking on a few extra hours at work. Many of these claimants already work full time, others have children or other caring responsibilities and so simply cannot work any more than they already are.

It is not too late to permanently reinstate this uplift in Universal Credit. Doing so would ensure that Universal Credit claimants across the country are better defended against the mountain of increased costs that they face. Doing so would prevent families from choosing whether to heat their homes or feed their children. Doing so would be the only responsible step for the UK Government to take in these circumstances.

Yours sincerely

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David Walker, Chair of Trustees, Citizens Advice Swale

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Cllr Carole Jackson, St Ann's Ward, Faversham & Mid Kent Constituency

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