

We've had a trip to 10 Downind Street Today. Below is the official Press Release. We are doing everything we can to assist those who become victims of a system which simply does not work and also the various charities who are picking up the pieces when Univarsal Credit puts people in real danger.

Press Release:-

" Universal Credit claimants take national petition to Downing Street, as thousands more go hungry

A NATIONAL petition calling on the UK government to Fix Universal Credit will be handed over at 10 Downing Street on Wednesday November the 7th.

The petition by the End Hunger UK campaign has been circulated and signed in food banks around the country by Universal Credit claimants, people experiencing hunger, and food bank volunteers and supporters. In total, over 18,000 people have signed it.

The petition will be presented at Downing Street by Tony Carson and Sue Rimington from York, who spent several weeks living in a tent this summer after moving on to Universal Credit, surviving on £4 a day between them. They will be joined by managers from Trussell Trust and independent food banks and Amanda Button, who has worked with many Universal Credit claimants through her voluntary work with anti-poverty organisation ATD Fourth World.

Tony said: ?Universal Credit does not work and it?s the fault of the system. It doesn?t help you get back on your feet, it traps you.?

Sue said Universal Credit was not the only cause of their problems but said: ?Universal Credit has swept us further into difficulty because you can never, ever, be in credit with Universal Credit.?

The petition calls for:

1) Urgent action to improve the flexibility and support for people on Universal Credit, including:

Flexibility for claimants (more scope for telephone applications)

Focused training for all staff including work coaches and call centre staff.

Increased awareness and implementation of Alternative Payment Arrangements

2) Improvements to its design to ensure it does not leave more people at risk of debt and destitution, including:

Debt advice included as part of Universal Support

Reducing the waiting time for payments from five weeks to two weeks
Introducing true yellow cards for sanctions
Reducing the level of loan repayments from 40% to 10%
3) A long-term commitment by the Government to ensure Universal Credit provides people with enough income to afford good food on a regular basis, including:
Increasing Universal Credit levels to the real cost of living
Restoring essential benefits including disability benefits and bring their levels up to the real cost of living.
Last week?s Budget statement suggests that the Government recognises that Universal Credit must be fixed. Some changes announced by the Chancellor are welcome, but for many living in food poverty in the UK these changes do not go far enough.

In July, nine organisations who are members of the End Hunger UK campaign published a report entitled ?Fix Universal Credit, no one should go to bed hungry?. This recommended short, medium and long term changes to Universal Credit, based on information and insight from more than 70 food banks, emergency food aid providers, and those assisting people in food poverty across the UK.

End Hunger UK welcomes the UK government?s announcement that it will reduce the maximum rate at which deductions can be made from Universal Credit from 40% to 30%. Our report however, highlighted that repayments should be reduced to 10% a month. We are also concerned that these changes will not be put in place until October 2019 meaning thousands of claimants will not feel the benefit of this change. One food aid provider told us: ?I saw one client who said he?d had an advance payment and had such a struggle paying it back he wasn?t ever going to risk asking for another. Advance payments don?t really solve anything in the long run.?

Sadly, the budget statement did not address the administrative and design problems inherent within Universal Credit. For example, a short-term, much-needed change would be to allow new applications to be made over the phone, as opposed to operating a solely online system, which is not accessible to those without internet access.

There has also been no recognition of the need to end the ?benefits freeze?. Universal Credit payment levels fall far below the actual cost of a decent standard of living in the UK.

Emma Revie, chief executive of The Trussell Trust: ?We created our benefits system to make sure support would be in place for each other, but if Universal Credit is to continue this legacy, more must be done. Foodbanks in our network have been clear: waiting weeks for a first payment, not being able to access support and receiving payments that just don?t cover the cost of essentials, are forcing people to use foodbanks. The time to act is now. We have to make sure our benefits system can help people to keep their head above water and afford food on a regular basis - no one in the UK should need a foodbank?s help.?

Sabine Goodwin, of Independent Food Aid Network, on behalf of End Hunger UK, said: ?Around the country, the Universal Credit system is not working. The changes in last week?s budget were a step in the right direction, but do not go far enough and lack the urgency required. The Fix Universal Credit petition has drawn support from all over the country. We?re grateful to everyone who has signed or helped to circulate it, and call now on the Government to hear and heed what people are saying.?