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11th February 2021

To:

Lucy Fraser	MP
Stephen Barclay	MP
Rishi Sunak	Chancellor of the Exchequer
Boris Johnson	Prime Minister

Universal Credit: £20 Uplift

Dear Members of Parliament

In the year 2020 Ely Foodbank distributed through its centres across much of East Cambridgeshire and Fenland over 80 tonnes of food to over 8,000 people in need. Only two years previously our same centres were distributing less than 50 tonnes to 5,750 people. We all know that the year 2020 was a year 'like no other', but as trustees we are concerned at deeper trends.

Our statistics available to us from the redeemed Foodbank vouchers in 2018 show that 'low income' was a major factor in 42% of referrals. In 2020 this indicator had risen to 54%. The 'low income' record can include people who have employment of some kind, as well as people on benefits such as Universal Credit, or a combination of both. We are concerned that despite people successfully claiming Universal Credit, they still find themselves having to make impossible family budgeting choices - and forced to turn to Foodbanks for help.

Many individuals and families are grateful that, in response to the pandemic, Universal Credit was given an uplift of £20 per week. We are grateful too: research commissioned by Trussell Trust and others all indicate the positive contribution to enabling claimants to better afford essentials through each month. This is matched by the anecdotal stories we hear first hand from the very people we help.

Yet the same research also shows that removing that uplift in the upcoming budget could push an extra half a million people, including 200,000 children, into poverty. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation research goes further, reporting a 'rising tide of destitution' since their last survey in 2017, and conclude that the number one recommendation should be to retain the £20 Universal Credit uplift.

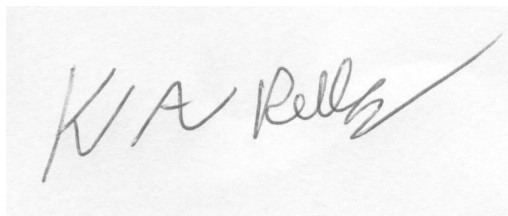
We concur with the analysis and conclusions of this research. Out of the myriad issues and problems to be tackled, it is crystal clear to us that:

The single most effective thing the UK government can do in its upcoming budget to avoid pushing large numbers of individuals and families into hardship, poverty and destitution is to retain the £20 Universal Credit uplift, and extend it to the equivalent 'legacy' benefits.

Note that this ongoing uplift will be far more beneficial than any form of single one-off payment. This is because the issue is about a long-term slide for many into poverty, rather than a single instance of hardship.

We appreciate the many dilemmas the government faces in these extraordinary times, and the tough decisions that arise. Yet any crisis gives leaders the opportunity to take definitive action and 'do the right thing'. In terms of how we support people who find themselves in financial difficulty across the nation, extending the £20 Universal Credit uplift is one of those 'right things' to do, and is within the governments power and choices in the coming budget. We urge you in strongest possible terms to heed this call.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karl Relton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Karl Relton - Chair of Trustees, for an on behalf of the trustees for Ely Foodbank:

Revd. Karl Relton
Mrs. Caroline Barnes
The Very Revd Mark Bonney
Mr. Gordon Foster
Revd. Jenny Gage
Revd. Jenny Webb
Mr. Peter Whale