MP wants benefits sanctions scrapped

Owen Thompson MP for Midlothian called on the UK Government to rethink the plans to reinstate benefits sanctions after a three month suspension during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Mr Thompson wrote to the Work and Pensions Secretary, Thérèse Coffey, calling for an extension to the 3 month pause on sanctions, after it was announced this would recommence with the full re-opening of Job Centres from tomorrow 1 July 2020.

The Midlothian MP said: "Reinstating benefit sanctions in the middle of a health and economic crisis is a profoundly callous step. We know Tories have a track record of punishing the poor, but surely even they have learned something from these last few months.

"Covid-19 has exposed the grave inequalities in our society. Instead of acting to fix this, conservatives are seeking to get back to business as usual.

"Removing benefits and forcing people to use food banks to feed their families does nothing to help anyone back to work. It is an ideologically driven, punitive measure which simply adds to the stress and anxiety for people who are already facing hard times. The welfare state should be built on fairness, respect and compassion – it should not damage the health and wellbeing of people it is supposed to support.

"At the very least the UK Government should extend the suspension of sanctions as the Covid-19 crisis continues and the numbers claiming Universal Credit soars. We need to do more for people who need a helping hand right now, not less.

Owen Thompson MP

"In the longer term, instead of bringing back sanctions the UK Government should take action to make sure nobody falls through the net in future. The Scottish Government is seeking to pilot a Citizens' Basic Income which would make sure every individual, regardless of existing welfare benefits, has a minimum payment to meet their basic needs. The UK Government should support this initiative and help bring about real change to rebuild lives, instead of standing in the way of a fairer society."