

Lifeline Universal Credit must not be cut

Owen Thompson MP has called for the £20 per week rise in Universal Credit to be made permanent to help protect from poverty, and build recovery, as lockdown restrictions remain.

Speaking during questions to the Department for Work and Pensions, Mr Thompson urged the Minister not to allow millions of families to lose out as the UK continues to grapple with Covid-19 restrictions.

The Midlothian MP highlighted a report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which estimated 1.3 million people across Scotland would be impacted if the UK Government does not make the £20 rise permanent. He also pointed to a Resolution Foundation report which highlighted geographical inequalities in the impact, with one in three working age families in so-called 'red wall' constituencies £1,000 a year worse off if planned cuts go ahead.



Owen Thompson MP

Mr Thompson said:- "The £20 uplift has made a welcome difference to living standards for Midlothian families struggling with poverty during the pandemic. As lockdown restrictions continue in the cold winter months, the need for these lifeline funds is even greater. It helps pay for heating and electricity bills, buy food and allow people to purchase

supplies like hand sanitiser to keep their families safe.

“It beggars belief that the UK Government could consider cutting this back again, when we have one of the least generous welfare systems in Europe. We know it would badly impact on working-age families in Scotland and the north of England – what happened to the so-called ‘levelling-up agenda’? What happened to doing “whatever it takes”? Pushing people deeper into hardship is not only immoral, it makes no economic sense. Poverty slams the door on opportunities.

“Cutting this support will impact on people who have lost their income as a result of Covid19 as well as those who already faced poverty before the pandemic – affecting 6 million households across the UK and pushing an estimated 700,000 into poverty at a time when unemployment is on the rise.

“We remain in the eye of the Covid storm and when furlough ends this month, there is a real risk that millions more will be left reliant on a welfare system that is not fit for purpose. The UK Government is replacing the Job retention Scheme with a half-hearted, half-baked support scheme which will prevent many employers from keeping people on while their trade remains restricted. There is still nothing to support all those excluded from government schemes, and it all but abandons the self-employed. This is not the time to cut lifeline support.

“If we don’t want to return to Dickensian levels of inequality, the DWP has to be prepared to help keep people afloat through this continuing crisis and help them recover at the other side. I urge them to start by locking in the emergency uplift to Universal Credit and extending it to legacy benefits instead of cutting things back to the bone.”