

PETER ALDOUS MP
(WAVENEY)



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

25th August 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to highlight to you our very serious concerns about the impact that the planned £20-a-week cut to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit will have on our constituents in October.

We do not take this step lightly, however, we have followed the issue with close interest and are alarmed to see the Government unwilling to heed the widespread warnings that are coming from all quarters. Many colleagues, including from the Northern Research Group, as well as cross-party voices such as the Work & Pension Committee have warned about the harm this will cause to living standards.

Further, recently, six former colleagues who served as Secretaries of State for Work & Pensions wrote to the Chancellor, warning against taking away this investment in our social security system, suggesting that cuts to social security spending in the decade leading up to this crisis went too far.

As Conservatives we believe in giving people the stable foundations from which to progress and thrive. We need to recognise that a well-functioning social security system is one of the crucial parts of this, giving security during life's many ups and downs.

Our central promise at the last election, that you articulated so well, was to level up. Infrastructure is a crucial part of this agenda, but with the emphasis solely on eye-catching projects we are at risk of forgetting the importance of investment in people in these communities, without whom this vision cannot be realised.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation today has shown that a huge 140 constituencies in Great Britain will see over a quarter of working-age families impacted by the cut, while almost half of all constituencies will see over a fifth of working-age families impacted. Coastal and Northern constituencies such as our own will be very seriously impacted. In our own constituencies, 26% of working-age families in Waveney and 20% in Carlisle will be affected by this cut. Many of those constituencies that are worst impacted are those that we newly won at the last General Election and are most in need of levelling up.

We have heard that the government's priority is to get people into work. You recently said that if you had to 'choose between jobs and welfare', then you would pick work. That is the right approach, but it does not fully reflect the world we live in.

The majority of people who will be impacted by this cut to Universal Credit and Working Tax are in fact already in work. We could see this proportion decreased through reforms to the labour market, but these kinds of changes will take time and will certainly not be in place by the end of next month, when these low paid, hardworking families will see up to £1,040 slashed from their income.

Access to good quality, well paid, secure jobs is essential, but so is support to access them. This must include the availability of flexible jobs, that can fit around childcare and caring, as well as tailored programmes for people with disabilities to ensure they have opportunities. The government has said good things about this and now it must make sure it delivers on its promises.

The availability of jobs and work programmes are vitally important, but there is a danger that we are failing to comprehend the complexity of people's lives and the manifestation of poverty. From our own experiences there are many people who are unfortunately too far away from the labour market to take advantage of those job opportunities that are currently available. Our social security system should be providing stability and security in order for them to fully engage, so that they can acquire the life skills to take those first steps in to work.

For people unable to work, those between jobs, including those who may take a little longer to find work, and those in lower paid or insecure work – Universal Credit should and can allow people to live with dignity and prevent people descending into spiralling situations of poor mental health, debt and destitution.

It is precisely these people the Government should have in mind as it considers this cut to Universal Credit. We are concerned that the record job vacancies figures will be used to justify the decision. The reality is that many unemployed people in receipt of welfare support face complex situations and are sadly very far from the jobs market at present.

Universal Credit has been the flagship of our essential work to reform social security over the last decade. The scale of the task means that there are of course still challenges to overcome to ensure it works for people, but the pandemic has put the system to the test, and it has worked very well. We now know it is a system that can cope under crisis, and with the increase in support, it is a system that can better protect families when they face hardship.

There are now no sensible voices calling for Universal Credit to be scrapped, but instead the investment that we rightly made should become permanent so that low-income families continue to be able to make ends meet. This could be one of our best legacies from the pandemic and can provide the cornerstone of a social security system of which as Conservatives we can be proud.

With best wishes.

Yours,

John Stevenson

Peter Aldous

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