

Briefing for immediate use - 18 February 2021

## Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead asks the government to keep its Universal Credit lifeline.

- Local charity says 77% of people seeking advice on benefits have never needed its support before
- Number claiming Universal Credit in Reigate and Banstead has risen 142% since pandemic began

A local charity has warned of the “devastating impact” of a scheduled cut to Universal Credit in April.

Staff and volunteers at Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead (CARBS) have helped over 1400 people with Universal Credit since March last year. 77% of people in Reigate and Banstead seeking its advice on benefits have never contacted the charity before.

Advisers say many needing to apply for benefits have lost their job or suffered a fall in income as a result of the pandemic.

Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead has continued to provide one-to-one support throughout the pandemic. It's now warning local families could be pushed further into hardship if the £20 a week Universal Credit uplift ends as planned in April.

In Reigate and Banstead, the number of people claiming Universal Credit has risen 142% since the pandemic started. This compares to a rise of 96% nationally.

For households in the South East of England, the loss of £20 a week is equivalent to over 2 days of food, or 6 days of energy.

**Andrea Dunhill, Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead, said:**

“We support people every day whose lives have been turned upside down by this pandemic. For many, Universal Credit is the lifeline that has helped pay the bills and put food on the table.

“But households across Reigate and Banstead now face the devastating prospect of a £20 a week cut to their benefits in just a few weeks. With a tough outlook for jobs, we're urging the government to continue doing the right thing and maintain the Universal Credit uplift.”

**Juliet Barclay, CARBS Help to Claim Manager, said:**

“The standard allowance being made available was arguably already too low to cover people's needs. Rishi Sunak's £20 uplift in March 2020 acknowledged this.

“Coronavirus means young people entering the job market face a tougher ladder than ever before. Mid-career people are losing the livelihoods they have spent

decades building. This is why we're saying the government must extend the Universal Credit uplift in April.

“Our Help to Claim team at Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead has been inundated with calls for help since the pandemic began. We can see the impact nationwide and the latest government and independent statistics show the welfare crisis is far from over.”

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#### **Notes to editors:**

1. The government introduced the £20 a week uplift to all Universal Credit payments at the start of the pandemic to support families affected by lockdown. The uplift is due to be removed in the Budget on 2 March. The campaign to keep it is broadly based, attracting support from respected economic think tanks such as the Resolution Foundation and Institute for Fiscal Studies as well as national housing and care charities.
2. To calculate how much £20 a week is equivalent to in everyday spending, Citizens Advice analysed the 2018-19 Living Costs and Food Survey (the latest available). This is a large, nationally representative survey run by the Office for National Statistics looking at household spending. To make sure we better reflect the likely experience of households on Universal Credit, we have only included households in the bottom half of the income distribution in our analysis. This is because average everyday spending by higher-income households is higher than lower-income households.
3. The increase (%) in the number of people claiming Universal Credit since the pandemic relates to the period March to December 2020.
4. Citizens Advice Reigate and Banstead has advisers available Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm. Residents can visit <https://www.carbs.org.uk/> for more information or call our National Adviceline on 0808 278 7945 (free).
5. Citizens Advice also runs a Help to Claim service to support people applying for Universal Credit. More information at [citizensadvice.org.uk](https://citizensadvice.org.uk) or call 0800 144 8 444.