

PRESS RELEASE

Incapacity benefit reassessments likely to force many to charity foodbanks

Reassessment of incapacity benefit could force affected families to turn to foodbanks for emergency food warns The Trussell Trust, a charity that has launched 71 foodbanks throughout the UK. The Trussell Trust gave emergency food to over 40,000 people nationwide last year, 37% of whom were referred to foodbanks due to benefit delay or reassessment. With an estimated 500,000 people expected to move from incapacity benefit to Job Seekers Allowance, foodbanks expect to feed many more people waiting for their new benefit claim to be processed.



Recently, a foodbank client in Ebbw Vale suffering from ME (Myalgic Encephalopathy) was moved off incapacity benefit because medical tests could not conclusively prove her condition. The client took her case to a tribunal with support from her doctor and won. During the process, the client suffered several weeks benefit delay meaning that she had to rely on Ebbw Vale foodbank for food.

Trussell Trust Director Chris Mould says: *'Our experience tells us that benefits reassessments lead to long delays in payments that see people go hungry. Foodbanks help prevent a crisis arising from benefit delay turning into crime, housing loss, mental health problems and family breakdown. Changes to incapacity benefit could cause untold distress if the government does not work with charities such as foodbanks to put the necessary support structures in place.'*

In 2009-10 MP Andrew Selous asked a series of parliamentary questions about numbers facing benefit delay which revealed that in January 2010 alone 37,046 people waited 17 days or more for their Job Seeker's Allowance, of which 20,068 waited 22 days or more. These figures do not include huge numbers that experience weeks of delay whilst their benefits are re-assessed.

Those likely to be most affected by this change are those living in the poorest areas warns Adrian Curtis, Regional Foodbank Manager for Wales: *'In Wales, 4 out of the top 6 boroughs with the highest numbers of incapacity benefit claimants are also in the top 6 with the highest proportion*

of JSA claimants per available job. Moving people off incapacity benefit will not necessarily move people away from benefit dependency as job opportunities are not available in these areas.'

Trussell Trust Director Chris Mould says: *'We urge the DWP to talk to us - The Trussell Trust foodbank network - and other charities like CAB and Salvation Army about how we can help them to ensure that people being re-assessed are appropriately supported and do not find themselves forced into situations that are very damaging in the long term and expensive for society.'* Ends

Notes to the editor:

- Interviews with foodbank clients affected by incapacity reassessments in the past may be available on request.
- Last year c.15,000 people received emergency food from UK foodbanks due to benefit delays and reassessments. Every foodbank client is referred by a frontline care professional such as a doctor, social worker or health visitor using a foodbank voucher.
- The number of people turning to foodbanks because they can't afford to feed their families has risen dramatically from 26,000 in 2008-09 to 41,000 in 2009-10, with an estimated 60,000 people fed in 2010-11. Currently over 70 foodbanks are launched, an estimated 86 foodbanks will be launched by March 2011.
- More than 2.5 million people currently receive Incapacity Benefit or ESA and all will eventually have to undergo a medical examination to assess their mental and physical capabilities.
- Until December 2008 Jobcentre Plus was one of the main distributors of foodbank vouchers. A government directive was issued under the previous government, stopping staff from issuing foodbank vouchers. The Trussell Trust is campaigning to have this decision reversed so that more people facing hunger due to benefit delays and stoppages have access to emergency food: [Full report](#).
- Chris Mould, Trussell Trust Director, also writes: *'For Big Society to be effective the government needs to listen to the experience of the Third Sector and involve us in policy formulation.'*
- Figures quoted above on JSA benefit delay are from Parliamentary question DWP PQ 316962 that was asked by MP Andrew Selous on behalf of The Trussell Trust. See: p.155 of <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/chan53.pdf> ; also <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100316/text/100316w0018.htm> ; and <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100316/text/100316w0018.htm>
- Figures quoted regarding the boroughs in Wales are taken from the Welsh Assembly Economy and Labour Market Summary for Welsh Local Authorities and can be viewed at:

<http://www.statswales.wales.gov.uk/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=14409#peopleworkbenefits>

- Figures quoted regarding Job Seekers allowance claimants per available job opportunity are taken from the Official Labour Market Statistics released by the Office for National Statistics and can be viewed at: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>
- The Trussell Trust charity runs a network of community-led foodbanks across the UK that provide emergency food to people in crisis. Foodbanks work in partnership with frontline care professionals such as doctors and social workers who identify to the foodbank people who are going hungry. The care professionals issue a food voucher entitling people to a minimum of three days of emergency food and signposting to other organisations able to resolve the underlying cause of the crisis.
- Clients are referred to foodbanks for a variety of reasons including redundancy, benefit delay, ill health, low income, homelessness and debt. Food is donated by schools, churches, businesses and individuals in the local area and sorted by volunteers.
- Foodboxes contain three days of nutritionally balanced non-perishable foods such as tinned fruit, vegetables, meat and fish as well as pasta, cereal, UHT milk, sauces, tea, long-life juice.
- The foodbank network run by The Trussell Trust helps churches to launch foodbanks in their local communities. Foodbanks are operating from Cornwall to Inverness. Recession saw a huge increase in the number of foodbanks opening nationally and in the number of people fed due to recession related problems. Despite the 'end' of recession, many people are still being affected by the economic downturn and are turning to foodbanks for help.
- The Trussell Trust's vision is to launch a foodbank in every UK town.
- The Trussell Trust is a Christian charity working to bring hope and practical help to people in crisis in the UK and Bulgaria.

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