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# Jobcentres to give charity food vouchers to neediest clients

Iain Duncan Smith has confirmed that Jobcentre Plus staff will be able to issue emergency food vouchers to clients facing crisis as a result of benefit delay or refused crisis loans. The decision is the result of pressure from The Trussell Trust charity that runs a national network of foodbanks providing emergency food to people in crisis. The scheme will be piloted from 4<sup>th</sup> January 2011 and aims to become national in April 2011.



Trussell Trust Director Chris Mould says: 'Thousands experience benefit delay in the UK every month. This can tip people over the edge, forcing them to go hungry. Last year UK foodbanks fed 41,000 people nationwide, 37% of whom were referred to us due to benefit delay. In 2008 Jobcentres stopped issuing foodbank vouchers to eligible clients, as a result people struggling to feed their children due to benefits

problems did not have access to emergency food from foodbanks.'

He continues 'Although it has taken two years of campaigning to get Jobcentre Plus to re-evaluate holding foodbank vouchers, we are delighted that Ministers are listening to feedback from the frontline of the voluntary sector. Their decision means people on the breadline will now get the help they need more easily and that's of course what matters to us in the foodbank network.'

There are currently 78 Trussell Trust foodbanks in Britain. Foodbanks give a minimum of three days of emergency food to people facing crisis in the UK. Every foodbank client is referred by frontline care professionals such as doctors or social workers using the foodbank voucher system. This makes sure that only those in genuine need receive help. By holding foodbank vouchers, Jobcentre Plus will make emergency food access available to clients in need who live near a foodbank. Each foodbank is run in partnership with a local church or community and all food given out is donated by the public.

This week The Trussell Trust has been working with Jobcentre Plus to finalise details of how the foodbank voucher scheme will work. The Trust hopes to confirm the arrangements next week before the pilot is launched on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2011.

The Department of Work and Pensions issued the following statement: 'We recognise the merit of having additional targeted support in place such as foodbanks which play an

important role in local communities. Jobcentre Plus is already in discussion with The Trussell Trust and have agreed to work together in the New Year.'

Chris Mould adds: 'Whilst benefit delay causing people to go hungry is clearly unacceptable, we welcome the government's decision to make emergency food help more easily available to those who slip through the net. We hope that the government will continue to consult with frontline charities to find a longer term solution to problems with benefits.'

*Ends*

#### **Notes to the editor:**

- The Trussell Trust aims to have launched 200 UK foodbanks by 2013, feeding an estimated 144,000 people.
- Director Chris Mould additionally comments: 'Unless the DWP has a target of reaching 100% of people, there will be thousands of people who will be left in trouble through benefit delay, or for not being eligible for a crisis loan, for whatever reason. If you have a family to feed and no money then waiting even a couple of days is too long.'
- "This is about sensible working between a public service and the voluntary sector."
- 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. *Figures quoted are from Parliamentary Question DWP PQ 316962*
- The previous government did not acknowledge that benefit delay was a serious problem, claiming that anyone in a crisis and entitled to benefits could get a crisis loan and would receive money that day. Under Labour, the Department of Work and Pensions stopped Job Centre Plus staff from referring clients going without food to a foodbank due to the belief that delay is not an issue.
- In December 2008 a DWP edict was issued enforcing a policy that Jobcentre Plus could not refer direct to charities such as foodbanks. As a result, thousands of people entitled to and waiting for benefits across the UK have not (until now) been able to be referred direct to a foodbank by Jobcentre Plus staff, despite the fact that many clients were struggling to feed themselves and their families. When challenged about its decision not to allow Jobcentre Plus to work with foodbanks, the Labour government initially responded that all those entitled to benefits received them on the day and that if delays occurred they people could apply for a crisis loan that would be paid that day and that therefore delay was not an issue. A further reason cited was that not every UK town has a foodbank and thus it would be unfair for some people to receive emergency food from foodbanks and not others.
- Many staff at Jobcentre Plus have expressed their desire to issue foodbank vouchers to clients facing crisis and some Job Centres have found informal, unofficial ways to

circumvent the system and enable their clients to receive the emergency food that they need.

- In 2009-10 UK foodbanks fed 41,000 people in crisis, in 2010-11 this number is set to rise to 60,000 people (including 20,000 children)
- Clients are referred to foodbanks for a variety of reasons including redundancy, benefit delay, ill health, low income, domestic abuse, homelessness and debt. Food is donated by schools, churches, businesses and individuals in the local area and is 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.
- Foodbank clients can receive a maximum of three foodbank vouchers in a row (each voucher can be redeemed for at least three days food). Clients can receive up to nine vouchers per year, although longer term support is available in exceptional circumstances.
- Currently 78 foodbanks have been launched nationwide and this number is growing rapidly. Our vision is that every town should have a foodbank.
- 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 is a Christian charity working to bring hope and practical help to people in crisis in the UK and Bulgaria.

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