

Councillor Lewis Ritchie
City of Edinburgh Council
City Chambers
Edinburgh
EH1 1YJ

Rt Hon Damian Green MP
Secretary of State for DWP
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

Dear Mr Green

We, the undersigned, call on the UK Government to revoke section 8 of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 and abandon the extended Benefits Cap; a policy which we believe will have a damaging and disproportionate effect on Edinburgh's citizens and place hundreds of families at risk of homelessness, material deprivation and household food insecurity.

Since the implementation of the extended Benefits Cap in November 2016, over 550 of the poorest households in Edinburgh have seen their benefits reduced. As organisations and individuals working on behalf of Edinburgh's most vulnerable people, we are already beginning to see the human cost of this policy and write to express our grave concern over the detrimental impact it is having on the most at risk in society.

We believe that the policy is fundamentally flawed and should be reconsidered immediately.

For one, the Benefit Cap is indiscriminate and fails to take account of individual household circumstances, breaking the link between need and social security.

According to the Department of Work and Pensions' own research, almost two thirds of those affected are female lone parents, while the Chartered Institute of Housing indicates that the group most likely to feel the impact will be single parents with three children. These are the families that should be protected and supported, not punished.

While we understand that the UK Government's objective may be to encourage people into work, we are concerned that pushing low-income households into further poverty, housing insecurity and debt will compound the difficulties they face and make the search for employment even more challenging.

Rent is fixed cost that cannot be reduced, therefore, those who cannot find work will have to choose between giving up their home or bringing down household expenditure through some other means – with research consistently demonstrating that low-income households are most likely to cut spending on heating and food.

Faced with such choices, we fear the devastating toll that this policy will have on the mental and physical health of those who find they no longer have enough to make ends meet.

Increases in the rate of child poverty, family breakdown and hunger are all likely consequences of this policy, which will place significant additional pressure on an already stretched network of local authority and third sector services that support those in need.

We believe that the most effective means of eliminating poverty and supporting people into work are those which are rooted not in ideology, but in the best possible international evidence and research.

Our experience tells us that it is targeted, holistic and individualised support which is most effective in protecting people from the poverty and assisting people into secure employment - not an arbitrary Benefit Cap which unfairly and unnecessarily targets the poorest and weakest in society.

Therefore, we compel you to lift the extended Benefit Cap and do what is required to support individuals and families who are just about managing.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lewis Ritchie', written in a cursive style.

Cllr Lewis Ritchie FRSA

Convenor of the City of Edinburgh Council Foodbank Working Group