

Southend Foodbank Meets Local MPs to Urge Action on Universal Credit Ahead of Crucial Vote

Thursday 26 June, 2025

Representatives call for an independent review into cost of living and a guarantee of 'essentials for all'

Ahead of a critical parliamentary vote on proposed cuts to health and disability benefits, Southend Foodbank representatives Cass Francis and Jemma Walsh travelled to Westminster to meet Southend's MPs, David Burton-Sampson and Bayo Alaba, during Trussell's national Lobby Day.

While in Parliament, Cass and Jemma discussed the growing hardship faced by people on the lowest incomes and urged both MPs to support the *Guarantee Our Essentials* campaign, led by Trussell and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF).

At the heart of the campaign is a call for an independent review to determine the true cost of covering life's essentials in the UK today. Currently, the basic rate of Universal Credit has no link to actual living costs (excluding rent and council tax) and falls far short of what people need to survive. The cross-party Work and Pensions Committee found that, even with recent increases, we are spending the same amount on benefits for working-aged people as we were in 2007.

Cass and Jemma urged MPs to advocate for increasing the basic rate of Universal Credit to £120 per week for a single adult and £205 per week for a couple. While upcoming changes in the Benefits Reform Bill promise incremental increases to Universal Credit, these won't be fully implemented until 2029/30 and will still lack any tie to the actual cost of living.

They also raised concerns about deductions from Universal Credit payments, highlighting the importance of a *Minimum Income Floor* - a limit on how much the government can deduct from payments. While the maximum deduction rate has recently been reduced from 25% to 15%, Southend Foodbank supports going further, again in line with evidence from an independent review.

In response to the upcoming second reading in parliament for the UC & PIP Bill, Cass Francis, Comms & Campaigns Coordinator at Southend Foodbank, said:

"It was a real privilege to speak face to face with both of Southend's MPs and to hear their thoughts on the *Essentials Guarantee*. No one should be forced to go without the basics they need to survive. Universal Credit must reflect the true cost of living.

"As you can imagine, we at the Foodbank, Trussell, JRF and many other organisations are extremely concerned about the proposed £5 billion in welfare cuts aimed at the benefits received by people with disabilities. We are urging everyone to write or email their MP and ask them to vote against these reforms.

"Trussell's analysis shows that 440,000 disabled people and their families will be forced into severe hardship by the proposed cuts, which will be devastating for them, and push many more people to the doors of food banks like ours."

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