

Don't wait until October

Supporting our local communities



Ashfield
Broxtowe
Sherwood & Newark



Abstract

Every year thousands of people come to us for help solving their problems.

This means we're an important part of the community, with a credible understanding of local needs.

When the government confirmed its intention of removing the £20 a week Universal Credit we took action to support our local communities.

We took a three step approach

- Gather and share evidence with our partners and stakeholders
- Raise awareness within our communities about the upcoming reduction in Universal Credit
- Encourage people to 'Start planning' and 'Get help from us' as soon as possible by letting them know about our services

Background



From March 2021 our lives changed as the country was hit by the COVID-19 crisis. As a result of restrictions put in place by the government in response to the pandemic, there was a surge in the number of people making a claim to Universal Credit credit.

The government increased Universal Credit payments by £20 a week as one of the measures to support people, alongside the furlough and self-employment schemes.

In July 2021, the government confirmed that the Universal Credit £20 a week increase will be removed at the end of September 2021.

The planned reduction in UC will hit claimants at the same time as the closure of the furlough scheme, an increase in the cost of living due to a rise in energy bills and food prices and the national insurance increase.

This means.....

The reduction in Universal Credit is a £1040 pay cut a year for the lowest-paid in our community.

While every Universal Credit claim will drop by around £85 a month, the proportion of income claimants will lose will vary depending on their circumstances.

Single people under 25 are set to be hit by the biggest drop.

Monthly standard allowances will drop:

By a quarter for single claimants under 25, from £344 to £257.33

By a fifth for single claimants over 25, from £411.51 to £324.84

By 17% for joint claimants under 25, from £490.60 to £403.93

By 14% for joint claimants over 25, from £596.58 to £509.91

£20 a week is
equivalent to

2 days food shopping
or almost **6** days of
energy costs

Local data

27,362

people living in
Ashfield, Broxtowe
and Newark &
Sherwood were
claiming Universal
Credit in July 2021

1 in 8

people living in
Ashfield, Broxtowe
and Newark &
Sherwood will be
affected by the
benefit cut

40%

of people claiming
Universal Credit in
Ashfield, Broxtowe
and Newark &
Sherwood are
currently in work

Local evidence

We carried out a survey that was open to clients and residents across our communities.

The survey was used to collect information on how people feel the loss of £20 a week is going to impact them.

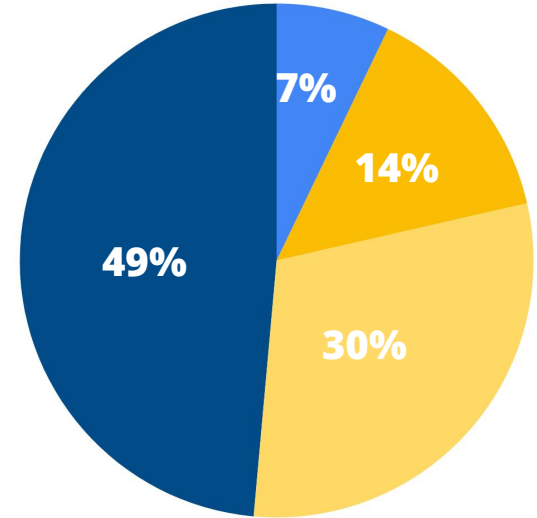
We also asked if they knew that they were going to lose £20 a week

34% said they didn't know that from October their UC payments would be reduced

Total number of respondents - 70

We asked - **What will be the effect on you of losing £20 a week from your Universal Credit payment?**

- I don't think it will negatively affect me
- I would need to cut back on some spending, but I would manage
- I would struggle to pay for essentials such as food, rent/mortgage and bills
- I am already struggling to pay for essentials and/or I have debts and this will make it worse



Evidence collected via the survey and from our clients shows us that the reduction in UC will impact people in a variety of situations and in different ways.

A client had to take out an advanced payment to get them through the 5 week wait. With their first payment due on the 25th September, they will only receive one payment before the extra £20 a week cut. This will hit them hard as they will have the advanced payment deductions.

Clients who contacted us about moving from legacy benefits to UC found that they would be much worse off on UC after the removal of the extra £20. With the uplift, the difference might have been more manageable.

Clients who have agreements with creditors based on the increased UC payments are concerned about managing after the cut, as their income will be reduced. For other debt clients, the cut could mean they have a deficit income, resulting in them not being able to get a debt relief order.

People who have told us they will struggle included: single people, couples, single parents, couples with children, people with disabilities, people with caring responsibilities, people who are renting and those with a mortgage, people in work, unable to work and those looking for work.

"haven't got enough to cover bills as it is never mind losing £20 pound a week."

"£20 per week is the difference between heating, light or food"

"£20 is half my weekly food shop. Its massive impact when things are already a struggle"

"This will not affect me adversely as I never budgeted for the extra £20 anyway."

Our response

In addition to supporting the National Citizens Advice 'Keep the Uplift' campaign, aimed at influencing the government to reverse this decision, Citizens Advice Ashfield, Broxtowe and Sherwood & Newark wanted to act collaboratively, working with each other at a local level, to support the people in our communities who will be affected not only by the government's decision to remove the extra £20 a week, but by increasing costs and possible job uncertainty due to the ending of the furlough scheme.

Gather and share evidence with our stakeholders and partners

Raise awareness within our communities about the upcoming reduction in Universal Credit

Encourage people to 'Start planning' and 'Get help from us' as soon as possible by letting them know about our services

Raising awareness with the public

We needed to get the message out to people on Universal Credit that they will be losing the extra £20 a week from October.

People can't prepare if they are not aware.

It is also important for people thinking of applying for UC.

To spread this message as widely as possible, we used a number of methods, including posters, press releases and social media.

The responses to our survey supported anecdotal evidence that some people claiming Universal Credit were not aware that the extra £20 a week was coming to an end.

One survey respondent commented.....

"I didn't even know I was getting extra, thought it was my regular payment as only had UC since my marriage breakdown a few months ago"

Don't wait until October

Problems don't happen in isolation and can have a severe consequences. Solving them stops these situations escalating.

Many people may not just be impacted by the reduction in Universal Credit. People may also be facing uncertainty in their jobs due to the ending of the furlough scheme, coupled with increasing outgoings because of rising energy cost and food prices.

Our next action was to encourage people to start planning and get some advice and support **NOW** and not wait until after they have had their first reduced payment.

We have been promoting various ways people can do this, from showing people how they can take action to help themselves such as sharing links to our budgeting tool, to letting people know about the specific advice they can get from us, including welfare benefits, debt, housing, and energy.

Actions taken



Our survey contained information about the UC reduction and links to our services



We asked our partner organisations to help us spread the message
Through a partner briefing and engagement pack that contained resources and suggestions



Used social media, newsletters and press releases to spread our messages



Created posters and leaflets to be displayed in our offices and in the wider community e.g. libraries, food banks



Asked our advisers to talk to our clients about this issue and give them our leaflets

What's next?

WE won't stop here.

We will continue to offer advice and support to people as this transition occurs and to support Citizens Advice in influencing a policy change by sharing our evidence.

But...

We also need **YOU**, our partners and stakeholders to support us by

- Identifying people who need support
- Signposting them towards the help they need

One of advisers said...

“£20 could mean the the difference between life or debt”

This is the case for one of our clients.

Kris has no arrears or debts currently, but is struggling to pay ongoing costs and is worried about falling behind with rent and becoming homeless again

Free, confidential advice.

Whoever you are.

We help people overcome their problems and campaign on big issues when their voices need to be heard.

We value diversity, champion equality, and challenge discrimination and harassment.

We're here for everyone.



Citizens Advice Ashfield

[www.](#)

Citizens Advice Broxtowe

www.citizensadvicebroxtowe.org.uk

Citizens Advice Sherwood & Newark

[www.](#)

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