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PRESS RELEASE

'Keep Universal Credit lifeline' urges Citizens Advice across Oxfordshire

- Benefits cut of £20-a-week set to **hit 1 in 9 people across Oxfordshire**
- Local charity warns of increased debt and hardship if 'lifeline' ends in October

Citizens Advice across Oxfordshire is urging the government against a cut to Universal Credit that would impact 1 in 9 working-age people in Oxfordshire

According to the latest available figures, approximately 40% of residents set to see their benefits drop are families with children and 44% are already in work.

Staff and volunteers at the local charity have helped over 5,100 people with Universal Credit since March last year. It says the £20 a week increase has been a 'lifeline' and has supported people who were already struggling before the pandemic as well as those hit by Covid job losses.

Cases seen by frontline advisers include Alison who lost her job in hospitality at the start of the first lockdown. There was no furlough option and she couldn't find another role so she applied for Universal Credit. She also suffers from Complex PTSD and the prospect of losing her home and the close community she lives in increases her anxiety.

"Taking away my £20 per week is incomprehensible – it's such a huge amount"

"I applied for Universal Credit during lockdown to keep me going as I lost my job. I hadn't realised the £20 extra was a temporary uplift. Taking it away is incomprehensible. It makes such a huge difference in helping me pay my bills and feed myself. I have so little money to live on and with winter coming, it will have an even bigger impact. Everything is so much more expensive now. I have many hospital appointments and that money helps me to get there. I am worried I might lose my home too."

The charity warns a cut to the benefit this autumn - as energy bills rise with the colder weather - will see many struggle to afford their essential costs. It fears a drop in income could be particularly difficult for new benefits claimants who may be unaware of the looming cut.

Matthew Smith, Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire

"That extra money makes the difference between choosing to put the heating on or eating a decent meal for the people we support. Many have lost jobs through no fault of their own and are still struggling to find work. It's only roughly £3 per day and the increase of £20 a week is absolutely essential for them to budget each month."

Pat Coomber-Wood, Chief Officer of Citizens Advice North Oxfordshire, said:

"Every day, our staff and volunteers see the difference the increase to Universal Credit has made to families. It's what has helped them keep their heads above water.

"Without that extra money, we fear we'd see more people coming to us in debt, unable to pay their bills or turning to food banks because they can't afford the essentials.

"As we look to rebuild from Covid, the government must invest in the benefits system and keep this vital lifeline."

-ends-

We give people the knowledge and confidence they need to find their way forward - whoever they are, and whatever their problem.

1. Figures on how many people will see a cut to their benefits refer to the working age population. Data from May 2021.
2. The latest available data for the number of families with children on Universal Credit is from February 2021.

Ends.

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- The four Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire, Oxford, North Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire and South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse all exist to provide free, confidential, independent advice in Oxfordshire and they are all members of Citizens Advice, the national charity
- For Citizens Advice general local free telephone advice, visit www.caox.org.co.uk.
- Citizens Advice Freephone Adviceline 0800 144 8848 and Textphone: 0800 144 8884
- Citizens Advice in Oxfordshire are supported by more than 670 trained volunteers and 52 paid staff working across 14 advice centres. In the last year, we helped 27,000 people across Oxfordshire with 78,000 issues.
- Citizens Advice is made up of the national charity Citizens Advice; the network of independent local Citizens Advice charities across England and Wales; the Citizens Advice consumer service; and the Witness Service.
- Citizens Advice helped 2.7 million people face to face, over the phone, by email and web chat in 19-20. We had 3.5 million visits to our national website. For full service statistics see Citizens Advice monthly publication [Advice Trends](#).