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The Rt Hon Dr Thérèse Coffey
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
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By email: secretaryofstate@dw.p.gsi.gov.uk

5 February 2021

Dear Ms Coffey

I am writing to express my disappointment in your decision to press ahead with freezing Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. I wrote to you on 7 December urging you not to proceed with that policy, and instead to honour the commitment you appeared to have given that the restoration of LHA rates to the 30th percentile would be permanent.

The freeze over successive years eroded the support available to tenants in the private sector to such an extent that in many areas of Scotland private sector accommodation was unaffordable for some families in receipt of housing benefit or Universal Credit. As a consequence, we have seen greater demands from private sector tenants on the mitigation funding we provide to councils through Discretionary Housing Payments.

In policy terms, the freeze makes no rational sense as it uncouples the support available from the local rental market rates. There is surely no justification for using the social security system to arbitrarily penalise some renters based on geography, especially during a global pandemic with all the associated restrictions on work and movement. At a time when our governments are rightly asking people to comply with the necessary restrictions we have in place to save lives, their options for escaping punitive cuts to social security are severely limited.

Since I last wrote, managing the pandemic has become more challenging, and further restrictions have been announced across the UK. If we look back to the UK Government's initial decision to restore LHA rates, and the situation the country faced at that point, surely all of the reasons your government gave for bolstering the support available are as pertinent now?

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Restoring Local Housing Allowance rates to the 30th percentile has a positive impact on homelessness and poverty – which was the point made strongly last year by your colleague Will Quinceⁱ. I am passionate about the work we are doing to tackle poverty and prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. The social security support available to people is an important part of that.

For these reasons I must again ask that you announce the retention of the £20-per-week uplift to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit, as well as the extension of this uplift to legacy benefits. At this time of increased financial strain and uncertainty, and in acknowledgement that many more people will need to rely on Universal Credit, people need to know that they can depend on such support. I call on you to make the uplift permanent, and to announce this without delay in order to avoid causing further anxiety.

I urge you to do the right thing, listen to what the public is telling you and maintain the support available through social security, which for many people will be the difference between keeping a roof over their heads and facing homelessness. The challenges we face due to the pandemic are real and unprecedented and while the vaccination programmes provide light at the end of the tunnel, to rein back support prematurely will compound the damage being done by the pandemic to the lives of some of the most vulnerable.

Kind regards



KEVIN STEWART

ⁱ [Around 900,000 could receive increased Housing Benefit from April - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

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