

Taxpayers Against Poverty

No citizen without an affordable home and an adequate income in work or unemployment.

Lord Ramsbotham
The House of Lords
London SW1A 0PW

29th December 2015

Cc Baroness Hollins
Baroness Meacher
Baroness Manzoor

WELFARE REFORM AND WORK BILL – REPORT STAGE

I would be very grateful if you will consider including the following points in the case for a well-being state when speaking to your amendment at the report stage of the Welfare Reform and Work Bill.

You will see at the end that I have suggested that the contribution of Dr Angela Donkin, of the Institute of Health Equity, **NOT HAVING ENOUGH MONEY IMPACTS ON HEALTH** – is spoken verbatim for the record in Hansard

NO SENSE OF PROPORTION AT THE DWP.

It is only from the Ivory Tower of Tothill Street, the DWP Headquarters in Westminster, that cuts in housing benefit could be called by Lord Freud "[rather small amounts—£50 or so](#)" [in the debate on the 21st December about the reduction of the benefit cap](#)¹ by the Welfare Reform and Work Bill (just above column 2353). There is no sense of proportion at the top of the DWP

¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldhansrd/text/151221-0002.htm>

£50 can trigger the local authorities' computers into sending out up to [3.5 million summons to court](#)² a year for late or non-payment of council tax, adding up to £125 enforcement costs, to which the bailiffs can add £400. It can be the tipping point into a notice to quit from a landlord for unpaid rent. £43 a week is the Joseph Rowntree foundation minimum income food standard for a healthy diet, researched by nutritionists and approved by the public. A healthy diet that competes with fuel, clothes, the price of a cheap pair of trainers, a bus ticket, the bedroom and council taxes for the £73.10 a week JSA for a single adult aged 25 to 60. [\(When I asked for the bedroom tax stories the response was shocking\)](#)³

The cumulative impact on health and well-being of the unemployed is measurable by the increasing number of visits made [to food banks](#)⁴, [to GPs surgeries](#)⁵, [malnutrition](#)⁶, incidence of poor maternal nutrition, [low birth weight](#)⁷ and [low expectation of life](#)⁸. (17 years between rich wards of Kensington at 88 years and the deprived wards of Tottenham at 71 years – see Marmot and).

Prevention, with a minimum income for healthy living, would be very much better in 2016 than the Welfare Reform and Work Bill creating ever increasing amounts of expensive treatment in the NHS.

NO RESPITE IN SIGHT FOR LOW INCOME RENTERS – ONLY LESS AND LESS INCOME FOR FOOD, FUEL AND OTHER NECESSITIES.

The Chancellor should consider the ever increasing rents and prices of a home before reducing the benefits incomes of the lowest paid

² http://bailiffadviceonline.co.uk/index/council-tax-national-non-domestic-rate-nndr/council-tax-liability-orders?doing_wp_cron=1451376781.2184059619903564453125

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/dec/22/bedroom-tax-my-spare-room>

⁴ <http://www.trusselltrust.org/stats>

⁵ <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/content/assets/PDF/publications/fundamental-facts-15.pdf?view=Standard>

⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/oct/28/nhs-hospital-tameside-food-parcels-patients-risk-malnutrition>

⁷ <http://www.ifbb.org.uk/professor-michael-crawford>

⁸ <http://www.socialeurope.eu/2013/03/the-biggest-injustice-in-modern-society-is-inequality-of-life-expectancy/>

and the unemployed needed for food, fuel and other necessities. ([George Osborne Urged to Make U -turn on Universal Credit](#))⁹. He allows rent and the cost of a home to be increased by demand from national and international speculators in British land while cutting housing benefit with the [bedroom tax, the benefit cap and the local housing allowance](#)¹⁰. There is no hope of an early respite from the creation of hunger in the UK housing market by increasing the supply of homes.

[Professors Danny Dorling and Paul Cheshire poured cold water on The Prime Minister's pledge to build a million more homes by 2020 when they gave evidence to the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee on the 15th December](#)¹¹. "If you really did want to build a million houses this fast, you have to worry about the fact that we cannot make enough bricks in enough time" said Dorling. "There is simply no way that we will build a million houses by 2020" said Cheshire. Meanwhile the lowest incomes needed for necessities will be squeezed ever smaller between the government's benefit cuts and the rising market rents.

DOES THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF CUTS, CAPS AND COUNCIL TAX, WITH A UK CHAOTIC HOUSING MARKET RAISING RENTS, BREACH THE HUMAN RIGHT TO HEALTH AND WELL-BEING?¹² ETHICALLY YES; LEGALLY IT HAS NOT BEEN PROMULGATED THE UK HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Article 25.

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

⁹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/benefit-cuts-george-osborne-urged-to-make-u-turn-over-universal-credit-a6787796.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.taxpayersagainstopoverty.org.uk/we-hold-that-land-exists-for-the-common-good-to-provide-a-just-share-of-shelter-food-water-and-clothing-for-everyone/>

¹¹ <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/economic-affairs-committee/economics-of-the-united-kingdom-housing-market/oral/26132.html>

¹²

(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

HOUSING BENEFIT

In our submission to the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee inquiry into the Economics of the UK Housing Market we recorded the fact that the cost of housing benefit to the taxpayers had been driven upwards by the UK housing market in short supply from £5 billion in 1988/9 to an expected £25 billion this year 2015/16. Following the 2008 crash both the Labour and then the Coalition governments set about cutting housing benefit. The details are as follows. They impact on the mental and physical health of the poorest men, women and children, at very substantial cost to the NHS and Schools.

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA).

The claimant has to make up any rental shortfall out of benefits intended to cover survival. It was thought by the Labour government that tenants would be able to negotiate a reduction in rent by the landlords, but in a market in short supply the option was always available to the landlord to evict for rent arrears and re-let at an increased rent.

“There are limits on the amount of LHA you can get. The maximum weekly LHA rate limits are: See Shelter

£260.64 for a room in shared accommodation,
 £260.64 for 1 bedroom accommodation,
 £302.33 for 2 bedroom accommodation,
 £354.46 for 3 bedroom accommodation,
 £417.02 for 4 bedroom accommodation,

The amount of LHA you are eligible for depends on where you live. Local limits are based on the cheapest 30% of properties in an area”.

The so-called Bedroom Tax.

I have met in Tottenham a single unemployed man aged 55 living in a two bed-roomed flat, who was looking for work, on £72.40 a week JSA after rent and council tax up to March 2013. From April 2013 he was expected to pay £24 a week rent for the spare bedroom and £5 a week council tax out of that £72.40 a week. Non-payment of the council tax was enforced by a summons to the Magistrates court and the addition of £125 costs. He was separated from his wife and was keeping the spare bed room available for his student daughter. The Rowntree minimum income food standard is £43 a week for a healthy diet, (see Table 1) researched by nutritionists at York University and submitted to public scrutiny for approval as a minimum reasonable cost of a healthy diet. He lost weight.

The £500 overall cap on benefits.

I have met in Tottenham a single mother with seven children; her total benefits were £782 a week including housing benefit. In April 2013 her housing benefit was cut by £282 a week to comply with the £500 cap. That £282 of unpaid rent had to be paid by the £500, leaving £218 to pay for food, fuel, clothes transport and other necessities for the eight members of her family. The £500 cap will be cut to £442 a week in London and £384 a week outside London by the Welfare Reform and Work Bill. That leaves even more rent unpaid by housing benefit in a housing market where rents increase due to high national and international demand in the low national supply of homes in the UK.

The definition of affordable housing.

The official definition of affordable housing is 80% of the local average market rents. That means the rent increases with the market whatever happens to the incomes of the tenants. In the [2005 Z2K memorandum to the Prime Minister on Unaffordable Housing](#)¹³ (see introduction on page 4) the late Professor Peter Ambrose and I defined affordable housing as follows.

¹³ <http://z2k.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Memorandum-to-the-Prime-Minister-on-Unaffordable-Housing.pdf>

"We hold that land exists for the common good. It provides the basic needs of shelter, food, fuel, water and clothing of which everyone should have a just minimum share. But housing and land have become investments, from which speculators, moneylenders and the banks grow ever wealthier. Governments have allowed the market to exploit the shortage of land by allowing unregulated lending to lift the price of housing above the needs of the poor in the UK.

'Affordable' in relation to housing requires precise definition. It means that once the cost of rent or mortgage (including service charges) and council tax has been met from the income of a household, be it an individual, a family or pensioners, there remains sufficient to sustain safe and healthy living, provision for the future and participation in the community.

'Unaffordable' housing means that the remaining income is insufficient to ensure these outcomes."

The late Lord Morris of Manchester sent the memorandum to Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who replied he had read it with interest.

Council tax

250 councils out of 326 in England and Wales are levying, since April 2013, between 8.5% and 30% of council tax on benefits provided by central government for shelter and survival. [3.5 million council tax liability orders were issued to councils by the magistrates in 2013/14¹⁴](#).

The government argues, disingenuously, that council tax is entirely a matter for the local authorities. [But the LGA has reported that they will not have been able to collect an estimated £1 billion from benefit claimants in the three years from April 2013¹⁵](#).

The government is making it ever more difficult to collect the council tax by freezing benefit increases at 1% for four years,

¹⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

¹⁵ http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/6869714/L14-635+Council+tax+support+report_v03/ad9031f0-d982-428d-bf98-5418b74a851c

cutting the benefit cap and randomly imposing sanctions without a fair trial.

The government is also creating unmanageable debts that increase the incidence of mental health problems.

NOT HAVING ENOUGH MONEY IMPACTS ON HEALTH

Dr Angela Donkin, Deputy Director at the Institute of Health Equity

My suggestion is that this is spoken verbatim for the record in Hansard.

a. Homelessness. There were 280000 cases in 2014 (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015). The homeless are more likely to die at any age than housed contemporaries. They are 35 more times more likely to commit suicide and, twice as likely to get cancer (Burki, 2010). A national audit in 2010 found that 82% have at least one physical health problem and 72% have at least one mental health problem (Homeless Link, 2010).

b. Inability to heat homes or cook food, 10.4% of the population are in fuel poverty. There were 18, 200 excess winter deaths in 2013/14 (ONS, 2014a). In the 25% of coldest homes, there is a 20% increased risk of winter mortality than those in the warmest (Wilkinson et al, 2001). Also cold homes are linked to higher level of respiratory conditions, (Hajat et al, 2007) poor mental health, (Hopton & Hunt, 1996) and higher rates of cardiovascular disease (Mercer, 2003).

c. Food poverty A. Analyses of the national Diet and Nutrition Survey 2008/9- 2011/12 has found that lower income groups consume less protein, iron, fewer fruits and veg, less vit C, less fish, less oily fish, and less folate. For example, 39% of women and girls in the lowest income group are below LRNI for iron, compared with 12% in highest income group. Lack of iron can lead to lethargy, higher susceptibility to illness and infection, heart and lung complications. Pregnant women with anaemia have higher risk of complications before and after birth.

d. Food Poverty B. Foods that are nutrient dense per calorie, are more expensive (Maillot, Ferguson, Drewnowski, & Darmon, 2008). Therefore people on low incomes will find it harder to buy the type of healthy diet for their children that we know we need to maintain a healthy weight – lean meat, fish and fruits and vegetables are relatively expensive forms of calories. The research has indeed shown that for any given level of energy intake, a lower consumption of fruits and vegetables was associated with lower diet cost (Drewnowski, Monsivais, Maillot, & Darmon, 2007) and that at each level of energy intake, higher dietary energy density was associated with lower diet costs (Drewnowski, Darmon, & Briend, 2004). In addition, in deprived areas, there also tends to be a proliferation of fast food outlets which serve large portions of unhealthy food which can lead to high levels of temptation'.

e. Children. Children born into poverty suffer an increased risk of mortality in the first year of life and in adulthood, are more likely to be born early and small and they face more health problems in later life. Preventing low birth weight should be a priority for public health officials; however efforts to do this will be hampered if parents have insufficient incomes. If the life chances of children are to be fully considered then it should be recognized that life chances begin in the womb, and not at birth. (Wolfe et al, 2014)

f. Income Poverty and particularly debt increase the likelihood of mental disorders (Taylor, Pevalin and Todd, 2007), including sleep deprivation and depression among new mothers. The effects are particularly evident among women because they are more likely to handle family budgets, have caring responsibilities and are often the 'shock absorbers' of reduced family incomes, meaning that they go without to protect their children from the worst effects of poverty. (Glennister et al 2009, Murray & Cooper 1997) Maternal depression is then, in itself, a significant risk factor for poor social and emotional development in children. (Petterson and Albers, 2001)

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