



Benefit claimants across Oxfordshire are struggling to afford essential bills and lose sleep over finances

People claiming benefits are struggling to meet essential costs such as rent, household bills and food.

New data from national Citizens Advice reveals that almost one in two (49%) benefits claimants have struggled to pay for essentials, while 40% have lost sleep due to money worries.

The charity is calling for increased financial support for people claiming benefits as it finds two in five (39%) of people who claim have less than £100 at the end of each month, after paying for essential bills.

Data from Citizens Advice across Oxfordshire reveals that since 1 April 2019, they have helped over 1600 people with 4000 Universal Credit benefit issues.

Since 1 April 2019, Citizens Advice North Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire, helped 357 people with 1078 separate benefits issues related to Universal Credit.

- 73% were related to initial claim (problems with IT access/capability, managing their journal etc.)
- 18% had limited capability to work
- 21% had problems because they did not know they had to re-apply for their housing benefit
- 12% had budgeting issues i.e. understanding how to budget, work out income and expenditure.

In summary:

- Three quarters of the people who sought help did not know how to claim for a variety of reasons
- One in five did not know that they had to claim the housing element of UC separately which often leads to debt and rent arrears
- One in eight people did not know how to look after their income and expenditure.

The four local Citizens Advice in Oxfordshire have added their voice to the call for urgent solutions from the government. This includes:

- End the freeze on benefit rates. Uprate payments by the Consumer Prices Index plus 2% for four years. Recalculate the Local Housing Allowance to re-establish the link with rental prices.
- Reduce the five-week wait by bringing forward the first non-repayable payment to no later than two weeks into a Universal Credit claim.

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

“Too often our frontline staff and volunteers see how the benefits system is not working for people in times of need.

“People on benefits who come to us for help are often struggling to cover everyday costs and bills, which can cause spiralling debts and sleepless nights. The clients we see are the most vulnerable and most likely to have debts and/or no reserves to call on.”

“We want the government to take urgent action and reduce the five-week wait for Universal Credit and end the freeze on benefit rates.”