

THE RT HON HUGO SWIRE MP

(East Devon)



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Ms Clare Bryden  
1 Miller Close  
Exeter  
Devon  
EX2 5NE

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Our Ref: HS69029

Dear Ms Bryden

Thank you for contacting me about food banks. First of all, I would like to pay tribute to all those volunteers and local organisers that help to run food banks. These people do great work in our communities that should be fully recognised.

I am mindful that food banks should not become a political football. People visit food banks for a variety of reasons that are often complicated and need to be understood properly. The use of food banks went up tenfold during the previous administration and that was when the country was experiencing a period of sustained economic growth. (I am not surprised that the Rt Hon Ben Bradshaw MP omitted this particular point.)

There are a number of reasons that can explain the recent rise in the use of food banks. One of those is the fact that on taking office the current Government has removed all restrictions on advertising for them, which were put in place by the previous Government, in which Ben Bradshaw was a Minister. These restrictions stopped organisations such as the Trussell Trust, which are doing incredibly valuable work, from notifying people at job centres about the help available to them.

Of course it is still highly undesirable that anybody should be in a position where they feel the need to visit a food bank in the first place. Everyone acknowledges that work is the best route out of poverty and I think the more that can be done to support people into work or to increase their hours, the better. This is why I welcome the 1.2 million new jobs that have been created since

May 2010 under the Coalition and the reduction of 244,000 in the number of households that have never worked that the Government has also delivered.

Furthermore, the Government's radical redesign of our benefits system through Universal Credit will make 3 million families better off by around £168 a month. The majority of these – 75 per cent - will come from the bottom two fifths of the income scale as Universal Credit helps encourage people into work and increase their hours. As work is the surest route out of poverty I have high hopes that these measures will improve the standard of living across the country and reduce the number of people who feel the need to go to food banks. I am certain like me this is something you would like to see.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. C. C. C.' with a stylized, cursive script.