



House of Commons
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Press Release – For immediate release

Sarah Champion
Member of Parliament for Rotherham
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Families face ‘Heat or Eat’ dilemma this Christmas

Sarah Champion MP has reacted with concern at the publication of a report which shows families are facing Christmas amid a growing struggle to feed themselves, heat their homes and cope with debt.

More households are now spending less than £20 a week on food, while over half have no money left after paying essential weekly bills, research by Real Life Reform - a major study by social landlords of more than 80 households across the North of England - has found.

In some areas, the report found that neighbours are cooking extra food and buying groceries for families and friends in their street who are struggling to cope. One group of mums even split the cost of Sunday lunch and cook in each other's houses to make sure their children get to eat 'some decent food'.

Sarah said: "I know the Government is telling us that the economy is getting better, but when I talk to people in Rotherham they are not feeling any benefit. I am deeply concerned that people are facing another winter having to make choices between heating their homes or buying Christmas presents for their children. We need practical measure to make this situation better, not policies that only seem to benefit the rich."

ENDS

Notes to Editors

The next round of interviews with Real Life Reform case studies will be taking place in January. The study's third report is expected to be published in March 2014.

Interviews conducted in 87 homes during October have revealed:

- the proportion of Real Life Reform households spending less than £20 per week on food has increased from a quarter to a third
- the number of people having no money left each week once bills have been paid is 51% - increased from 39% in July
- the average spend on food per person per day is £2.10 - down from £3.27 in report 1
- households are spending 16% more on gas and electricity
- the proportion of households having to make debt repayments of more than £40 per week has doubled

- the average level of debt per household is £2,273
- 33% of respondents now have council tax debt
- 83% of households think welfare reform changes will adversely impact on their health and wellbeing
- 86% think welfare reform will adversely affect shops and businesses in their neighbourhood – up from 68% in round 1
- there is increasing criticism of support received to help people access employment
- participants who are looking for work or for more hours have made on average 40 applications in 3 months but 70% are not reaching interview stage