



PotteriesCold

FROZEN!

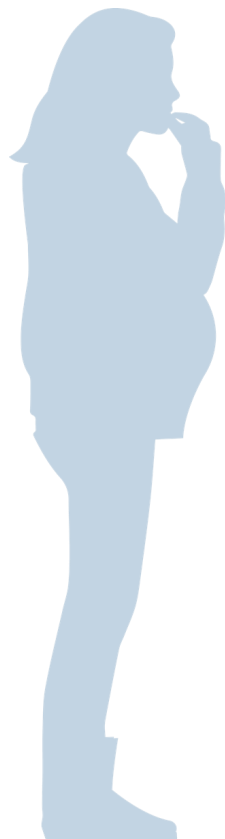
Most working-age benefits were **frozen** between **April 2016** and **March 2020** - one reason why there is such a vigorous campaign to **keep the £20 uplift** to Universal Credit, and to extend it to Legacy Benefits.

However, there are some elements of the benefits system that have been **unchanged** for much longer. Few of these quiet cuts make the headlines, yet the impact on low-income families can be dramatic...

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS.

Last week, we explained the rules for getting a Cold Weather Payment worth **£25 per week**, but did you know the Cold Weather Payment has been stuck at that rate **since 2008!**

It's a shame the same cannot be said for our fuel bills!



SURE START MATERNITY GRANT

This grant, launched in 1999 to help with the cost of essentials for a new baby, rose steadily to reach **£500** by **2005**, but has not been increased since then.

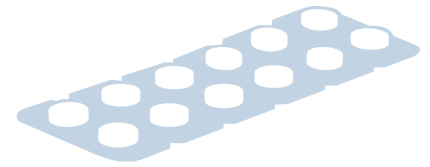
In fact, in **2011**, the law was changed, limiting the Sure Start grant to the **first child only** of most families, even those who hadn't claimed one for any older children.

You can **find out more** about the Sure Start Maternity Grant here:

www.gov.uk/sure-start-maternity-grant

FREE SCHOOL MEALS AND FREE PRESCRIPTIONS

You can qualify for these if you get Child Tax Credit (but *not* Working Tax Credit) *and* your earnings are below a certain 'threshold'. That threshold is **£16,190** per year for Free School Meals and **£15,276** per year for Free Prescriptions.



These figures used to be updated regularly but neither has been increased since **2010!**

As a result, many **low-income, working families** have **no right to free school meals**, or to free prescriptions, because these thresholds have not gone up in step with prices or the Minimum Wage. The thresholds are **even lower** for workers on Universal Credit.

And many schools have lost valuable **Pupil Premium** funding, linked to the number of their children getting free meals, even though their pupils' families are often **no better off**.

BACK TO THE 80s!

If you're a single person on **Income-based JSA** or **Income Support**, and do a small amount of work, you'll have **£5 per week** of your earnings **disregarded**.

If you're part of a couple getting these benefits, that goes up to **£10 per week**. These amounts **haven't changed since** **Income Support** was introduced - in **1988!**

CAPITAL LIMITS AND TARIFF INCOME.

The **capital limit** for working-age claimants was raised to **£16,000**, and the **capital disregard** to **£6,000** in **2005**, more than 15 years ago.

The **tariff income rate** - **£1** for each **£250** (or part of) over the disregarded amount dates back to **1988!**

LIMITS ON CHILDCARE COSTS.

In **2010**, the limits for **Childcare Costs** when claiming **Tax Credits** were set at **£175 per week** for one child and **£300 for two or more**, with **Tax Credits** paying **up to 80%** of this amount.

Tax Credits now pay **no more than 70%** of your **childcare costs** but **Universal Credit** can pay **up to 85%**. However, the limits are still **fixed at the 2010 level**.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL BONUS

The **£10 Christmas Bonus**, paid with **State Retirement Pension** and some other **non-means-tested benefits**, was first added to **Pensions** in **1972**. **It's still £10!**

As Mr Scrooge might say, "Bah, Humbug!"



Potteries Gold is a **Citizens Advice Staffordshire North & Stoke-on-Trent** project, to help people in Stoke-on-Trent cope with changes to the benefit system

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