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### **Universal Credit and Foodbanks:**

I want to pay tribute to the charities and volunteers who operate foodbanks. However, I believe food insecurity is a symptom of economic failure and I am calling on ministers to offer real help to all those struggling to feed themselves.

In my view, the reason why foodbanks are now having to support people at unprecedented levels is because of the actions of the current Government. Ministers have allowed inflation to rise higher in the United Kingdom than in almost any other advanced economy. They have increased taxation on working people. Last year, they pursued a mini budget which damaged our economy and forced both mortgages and rent bills up. Families up and down our country are paying the price for these failures and for the failures of the past 13 years.

I understand that the Trussell Trust and other charities welcomed the Government's belated increase of most social security payments by 10% from April this year. However, many charities have pointed out that this is less than the rate of inflation recorded in October 2022, and so is not the real terms increase that they have called for.

More widely, I note that in 2022 benefit sanctions rose to record highs. I believe we must reform the way Universal Credit operates to better ensure that the system treat people with dignity, not burden them with impossible debts. I believe that our economy has been forced into a vicious circle of higher taxes, lower investment, squeezed wages and the running down of public services, all of which damage growth. In contrast to this Government's policies, I want to see a fairer, greener, and more dynamic economy, creating jobs across the country in renewables, nuclear power and insulating homes.

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