

The issues

The 2015 Fresh Start Agreement established a £585m package of measures to mitigate the impact of welfare reform in NI. **The package is due to end in March 2020.**

Since 2017, welfare support for families, provided in the form of the child element of **Universal Credit, has been restricted to the first two children in a household.**

The impacts

Unless welfare reform mitigation is extended, **34,000 households will be worse off by an average of £12.50 per week** because of the bedroom tax & **1,500 households will be worse off by an average of £42 per week** because of the benefits cap.

Low-income families unable to claim Universal Credit for a third, or additional child, will lose out **£2,780 per year**. This will result in **300,000 more children being in poverty** across the UK by 2023-2024, with 9,000 of the children affected living in NI.

NI is likely to be disproportionately affected by the Universal Credit two-child limit given the region's larger family sizes compared to GB.

A growth in poverty will increase pressures on social services. Children living in our most deprived areas are six times more likely to be placed on the Child Protection Register and four times more likely to become looked after by social services than those in our least deprived areas. As few as **176 extra children would need to be looked after by social services** before additional spending on care in NI exceeds the amount saved by preventing access to Universal Credit for all cases in the region which result in children being pushed into poverty.

Growth in poverty is also likely to heighten pressures on the youth justice and criminal justice sectors, and raise demand for health services as a result of an increase in Adverse Childhood Experiences.

The solution

BASW NI has called on the UK Government to implement measures recommended by the House of Commons NI Affairs Committee and Work and Pensions Committee to:

- **Legislate to extend welfare reform mitigation for four years**
- **Halt the implementation of the Universal Credit two-child limit in NI and reimburse any families who have been affected**

BASW NI has written to the Secretaries of State for NI and Work and Pensions, and the leaders of all main NI political parties, urging them to support these measures.