Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry on Child Maintenance Service

Submission from Feeding Britain (October 2025)

About Feeding Britain

Feeding Britain is an award-winning charity with a vision of a UK where no one goes hungry. We support a national network of 140 regional and local anti-hunger partnerships comprising more than 700 frontline organisations – ranging from community centres and schools, to local authorities and social enterprises.

By piloting innovative and effective new projects, and showing how severe or chronic food insecurity can be prevented, we are designing a road map for eliminating hunger from the communities we serve. By sharing this knowledge with others, and using it to work for systemic changes at a national level, we will ensure hunger becomes a thing of the past.

Consultation response

Feeding Britain has heard from a number of individuals and organisations across our network who have reported issues with the Child Maintenance Service. Our response highlights the key points they raised, as they relate to relevant questions in the call for evidence.

How adequate is the support provided by the CMS to Paying Parent, Receiving Parents, and victims of domestic abuse? How could this be improved?

One of our network members, who was a victim of domestic abuse, said she found the support provided by the CMS to be inadequate: "I became a single mother very suddenly and at that time I had two young boys, a mortgage to maintain etc. I have had very little in terms of CMS support over the years and I fully appreciate that they have quite generic rules to follow however I have had to deal with payments stopping and the financial implications of that, my current case is £6k in arrears which I am told I can only recover through the courts myself and the stresses of irregular payments."

She added that "It has largely felt throughout that the service is not on the side of the non-paying parent and the financial needs of them and their children. Whilst I fully appreciate this is not about taking sides and that the paying parent must also be left financially stable too the impact on my children has been that they have gone without things at times or have been deprived of things that they would otherwise have had. There has to be a better way and a more supportive, less generic service which looks at how it could be more flexible to prevent future children suffering."

Is the Government's current approach to calculating Child Maintenance rates appropriate? How should child maintenance rates be calculated?

Blackburn Foodbank said that they welcomed the Government's proposals for the CMS, including the changes to the maintenance calculation: "The introduction of a full maintenance calculation would be beneficial to food bank users as this would help when advisers are supporting clients with budgeting and debt advice."

Are there any groups of parents who find it particularly difficult to interact with the CMS? For which parents is the system not working?

Overall, parents who are affected by food poverty are reporting that the system is not working for them.

Our Nourishing Norfolk partnership told us that parents they support find the CMS to be unreliable: "You can't depend on the right amount coming through at the right time, the amounts differ for no reason and the money stops for no reason. This makes forward planning and budgeting impossible. And makes it more likely that the family would rely on food bank or other crisis provision." They gave the example of two families who recently visited a food club in the county, who used the CMS: "The confusion about how much and when it would be paid is more than frustrating. It's stressful. And it means they are worried all the time about how they will manage if it doesn't come in as expected and they don't know how to budget for that."

Blackburn Foodbank also told us that parents they support have experienced issues with the CMS, and so welcome the Government's proposed changes to it: "From a food bank perspective we feel that the changes will have a positive effect on parents with dependent children. They will receive the much needed financial support from a paying parent as currently this very much depends on those payments being directly made. Unfortunately at the present time we find that the paying parent can miss payments which contributes to overall child poverty."

How effective is the CMS at complaint handling and complaint resolution?

Our Nourishing Norfolk partnership said parents they support found handling of complaints by the CMS to be ineffective: "Trying to get answers on why the amounts have changed/stopped etc is too difficult and takes too much time," adding that they are made to feel "like scroungers."