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Universal Credit – Full Service Roll out in Scotland

I am writing today to call for a complete halt to Full Service roll out of Universal Credit (UC) in Scotland with immediate effect. There are several significant problems, which I set out in detail below, that are now impacting so severely on tenants and landlords that I believe continued Full Service roll out in Scotland is no longer feasible. I call on your Department to resolve these problems, before UC roll out continues.

First, the built in 6 week wait for the first payment is throwing some households into crisis and building up rent arrears. As well as causing considerable hardship for those affected, there is a knock on pressure on other local council services, as well as the Scottish Welfare Fund. This service should not be diverted into filling gaps caused by ill-designed UK Government welfare policies.

Moreover, it appears that many people are waiting longer than 6 weeks for their first payment of UC, causing even greater hardship. I can only assume this is due to the increasing numbers of complex cases coming onto UC and the lack of operational capacity to support them. Advance payments of benefit are not well advertised and the repayments are automatically deducted from UC payments for at least 3 months. This means families have a period of time to manage on an income below the UC rate, putting them at risk of spiralling into debt.

Like me, you will be aware that landlords are increasingly reporting major issues in communicating with DWP, notwithstanding the work that has already been done to try and alleviate some of the administrative difficulties surrounding payments of rent. I understand that even when it has been agreed that there should be a managed payment of rent to a landlord, it can take up to 10 weeks to get a payment. Not all landlords will wait that long before starting eviction proceedings.

It appears in some areas properties are now being advertised as 'No UC' due to the landlord's experience with late payments from DWP. As well as the impact on individuals, there are real concerns about the financial impact on housing associations' income streams and reserves.

I am aware that DWP are still working on a solution to the housing element issues within UC. However, given some of these issues were raised at the commencement of Live Service roll out I am not confident that a permanent fix will be implemented in the near future. The increasing pace of roll out from the autumn will no doubt exert more pressure on DWP operations.


These and many other issues were mentioned in the letter from Damian Hinds, Minister of Employment, to the Work and Pensions Committee on 1 March. Unfortunately, his response, against a backdrop of delays and continuing operational difficulties within UC, does not provide sufficient reassurance that these issues will be suitably resolved in the necessary timescale.

The problems arising are impacting on individuals and families to an unacceptable extent threatening not only the tenancy of their home but of accruing longer term debt. The UC approach of "test and learn" has kept volumes relatively low during the design stage, as Mr Hinds pointed out. Your Department should now demonstrate its commitment to this approach, by deferring the plans for scaling up the roll out of the UC Full Service until such time as all the issues are fully resolved. Given the experience to date it is clear that further roll out cannot be undertaken without causing further hardship for claimants and as such can surely not be considered safe.

You will be aware that the Scottish Government is not alone in expressing these concerns. The Work and Pensions Committee along with the Social Security Committee at the Scottish Parliament have carried out their own inquiries and evidence gathering. Both Committees have expressed their concerns to you, as have the Local Government Association and local authorities.

In summary, to protect the more complex cases being drawn into hardship situations, I must request a halt to Full Service roll out in Scotland to allow for some space and time to get the issues finally resolved.

Please be assured that I have not taken this decision lightly, given the implications for the timetable to implement the Scottish UC flexibilities in the autumn. However, I cannot stand by and allow this situation to continue when it is impacting so adversely on the people of Scotland.

Yours sincerely


ANGELA CONSTANCE