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The Right Hon Esther McVey MP  
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions  
Caxton House  
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19 March 2018

Dear Esther

As you may know, my officials were contacted earlier this week by Neil Couling, Director General Universal Credit, and advised that the changes to be made to the UC system to allow the bedroom tax to be abolished in Scotland would be delayed until May 2020 at the earliest. The original timeframe which our officials had jointly agreed and were working to was Spring 2019.

Abolishing the bedroom tax is an important manifesto commitment and a pledge the Scottish Government has repeatedly made in successive Programmes for Government. I am therefore disappointed and surprised to learn that your Department has not ringfenced our changes to be implemented in 2019 or allocated any dedicated resources to deliver this commitment. We have, it appears to me, been essentially reprioritised in a queue of existing and new work, much of which would appear to post-date the Scottish Government's policy.

While I do accept that your Department will have many priorities, the transfer of these powers from the UK to the Scottish Parliament is a commitment made by politicians from all parties and now law under the Scotland Act 2016. I am becoming increasingly concerned that your Department is not consistent in displaying either the willingness nor urgency to deliver on what is very much a joint programme of activity over the coming years. And while I understand that *our* plans form a key part of the programme which your officials and mine are working hard to deliver, it appears to me that known steps which DWP could and should be taking to prepare for devolution irrespective of our timescale and plans (whether in terms of systems, processes or policies) are either not happening at all or happening at such a pace as to be barely detectable. I have placed concerns about the resources being devoted by the Department to this joint programme on the record with your predecessors on several occasions and am now doing so again.

In terms of the specifics of Mr Couling's letter, I am glad to see an acknowledgement of the additional burden that this unilateral decision will place on Scottish local authorities; however the impact of having to mitigate the bedroom tax for an increasing number of UC claimants should not be underestimated. Furthermore this delay increases the risk of UC claimants not getting the proper support, potentially undermining our policy of full mitigation. I hope it



should be possible for DWP to take active steps to help local authorities with the additional administrative burden, and I expect your Department to engage with us constructively and quickly on this matter.

I have therefore asked my Private Office to contact yours to check your availability for a call hopefully over the course of the next week.

Yours sincerely



**ANGELA CONSTANCE**