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Local Authority Chief Executives

Universal Credit – further information on rollout

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions recently announced the next steps for the roll out of Universal Credit. In addition to the four pathfinder sites that have already started taking claims, an additional six Jobcentres will start to accept new claims from unemployed single claimants from October 2013. Alongside this, we will start the cultural transformation that the benefit will bring through the national implementation of the Claimant Commitment and enhanced jobsearch support across all Jobcentres. Ten in-work conditionality pilots will test how best to encourage claimants to progress in work and we will improve access to digital services across Jobcentre Plus, to ensure that jobseekers become used to online transactions.

The Government remains on track to deliver Universal Credit safely and securely by 2017. We have already shared our draft plans with representative groups from the local government sector to achieve this. As these plans develop, Howard Shiplee, DWP's Director General for Universal Credit, will maintain an open dialogue with local government representatives. In the meantime, I recognise that you need a degree of certainty for planning purposes. I would like to reassure you that **we will maintain the level of funding required to manage the full administration of Housing Benefit in 2014 to 2015.**

Update on local support services

I wrote to you in February this year on the publication of the Universal Credit Local Support Services Framework (LSSF). This set out in outline how DWP intends to work in partnership with local authorities to ensure support is in place for claimants who need additional help when Universal Credit replaces various benefits and credits.

We are aware of the need to refocus the local support services work in light of the recent announcement. In outline, our intentions are now:

- to continue to develop certain items where production is already underway and where it is valuable to do so; such as aspects of the financial model, and early work on partnership development
- where possible to test aspects of the LSSF within the pathfinder and the new live Universal Credit areas
- to develop new opportunities for testing and trialling local support services over the next 18 months.

I said in my previous letter that we would update the LSSF in October 2013. Our update will include conclusions from further joint work with local government colleagues, for example on the financial model; lessons learned from the pilots and pathfinders; and our strategy for the further testing and trialling that we plan to undertake. Our aim is then to produce a fully updated LSSF document in autumn 2014 that will provide definitive baselines to allow local authorities to plan their services for the 2015 to 2016 financial year.

I fully appreciate how important local authorities are in delivering Universal Credit, and that many of you have already taken steps, in collaboration with DWP operational colleagues locally, to look at service provision and develop the delivery partnerships that will be needed. I am also aware that these conversations can help enhance current service provision. I would encourage you to continue to collaborate on existing services where it seems sensible to do so. I look forward to deepening this as the programme moves forward.

*Yours sincerely,
David*

Lord Freud

Minister for Welfare Reform