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Rt Hon Damian Green MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
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9th December 2016

Dear Damien,

Thank you for the speed of your response of 8 December, which goes some way to addressing the points raised in my letter of 7 December. However, a number of the issues I raised remain outstanding.

Your response establishes a basis for rationalising the Jobcentre Plus estate in Glasgow on the grounds of operational and cost effectiveness. While you recognise there will be implications for Jobcentre staff in Glasgow, I would appreciate further detail on the capacity of the network in Scotland, recognising my previous point about the increasing level of expectations on those delivering these crucial public services.

While I note your intention to consult, I would emphasise again my expectation that you will provide assurance, where possible, that DWP customers will not be adversely affected by the decisions you make following your consultation. This is of particular importance to me both in terms of the risk of diminished accessibility to services, and mitigating any increased threat of sanctions which can be created around non-compliance in terms of both the need attend, and to do so in a timely manner, at Jobcentres. To help DWP to consult fully, I would be very happy to work with you to ensure DWP can access our extensive and well established employability Stakeholder networks in Scotland, to help you engage all views and constituencies in all parts of Scotland your consultation approach.

My request that cross Government communication be improved in future has also not been fully addressed. In a spirit of co-operation, and on the expectation that the changes you announced this week in Glasgow are part of a wider process in Scotland, I would urge you to you agree a more proactive and collaborative approach to issues which have implications on areas of responsibility being devolved to Scotland. An increased level of co-operation between both Governments was clearly identified by the Smith Commission as crucial for successful devolution.

I firmly believe are significant opportunities in such co-operation, both for Scotland and the rest of the UK. This includes alignment of reserved and devolved programmes; ensuring users receive a seamless, joined up and effective services. It also includes maximising efficiency and value for money, not only in joining up Scottish and JCP employability services, but also in respective estate opportunities through co-location agreements.

Within that context I re-iterate the need to keep a focus on paragraph 58 of the Smith Commission, which clearly establishes the need for more effective cross Government relations around JCP, while recognising its reserved nature. The JMWGW has proved itself to be a valuable forum to develop this type of relationship. I am glad there has been an initial discussion on how we collectively meet the expectations of paragraph 58, and more work on this is now underway at official level. But developments over the course of this week underline the value of developing avenues for more systematic joint working, discussion and communication on this aspect of devolution. I believe it is crucial we move our discussions on the alignment of JCP services in Scotland with devolved employment support forward quickly, and recognise the need for new, robust and enduring governance arrangements to support these new working relations.

Effective employment support in Scotland for those unemployed groups who are disadvantaged in the labour market is an objective I'm sure we share, and agree is the foundation for our Cross government responsibilities. It is important therefore the next meeting of the JMWGW explores both the implications of your People and Locations Plan in Scotland and in context with the rest of the UK, and its impact on devolution at its next meeting on 30th January 2017.

JAMIE HEPBURN

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

POSITIVE ABOUT DISABLED PEOPLE