Rt Hon Meg Hillier MP  
Chair of Public Accounts  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 9NA  

27 June 2019

Dear Mr Hillier

UNIVERSAL CREDIT – SUPPORT PACKAGES FOR CLAIMANTS WITH VULNERABILITIES

1. In our Treasury Minute response to the sixty-fourth report of the Committee of Public Accounts into Universal Credit we promised to set out how we provide support to claimants with vulnerabilities by June 2019.

2. We know that many of our customers are likely to have multiple and complex needs and we need all of our work coaches to be able to recognise and respond appropriately to a customer’s situation. The following document sets out how we equip Universal Credit work coaches to identify and support customers with complex needs.

   **Jobcentre Complex Needs Toolkits**

3. Complex needs toolkits are an essential part of the support available in the jobcentre for customers with vulnerabilities.
4. Every jobcentre has a complex needs toolkit, developed as part of its preparation for Universal Credit. The toolkit was introduced to ensure service delivery colleagues have access to all the information they need to support customers with complex needs and signpost them to local provision offered by partner organisations.

5. The toolkit is a living document, owned and updated by the jobcentre and tailored to their local setting and needs.

6. As part of our One Service approach, and to ensure customers are correctly supported at any point they engage with us, jobcentre complex needs toolkits are accessible by their linked service centre.

7. Alongside links to key guidance and local provision held on the National/District Provision Tool, it also contains an action plan and events page. The action plan captures everything the jobcentre is doing to improve the support available for customers with complex needs.
8. The events page captures any complex needs-related events taking place in the jobcentre or local area.

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**National/District Provision Tool**

10. The District Provision Tool (DPT), linked to from the complex needs toolkit, provides access to the full range of provision and support delivered by the jobcentre, as well as other providers such as local authorities, and independent and volunteer / charity organisations.

11. It hosts all the available provision and support in a district and nationally, including specialist support information and signposting details for customers with complex needs; this covers contracted, non-contracted, community and local groups as well as national support organisations. The District Provision Tool is maintained by the district based on their local knowledge and contacts.

### Addiction (Drugs/Alcohol) Barnsley

#### Feedback

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Learning

12. Universal Credit has a comprehensive learning journey which equips our work coaches with the holistic skills, knowledge and behaviours they need to support all of our customers, including those with complex needs. There are four key stages to the learning journey – preparation; facilitation; consolidation; and continuous learning.

13. For experienced work coaches, the facilitation phase lasts two weeks; for new work coaches, it is five weeks. This phase is classroom based and focuses on building the foundation and layering on complexity using technical / skills practice, scenario exercises, group problem solving and real life case studies. This includes a specific focus on customers with complex needs. This is followed by the consolidation phase, which is owned and delivered locally, and lasts around three weeks. However, this is not the end of the learning journey; it is an ongoing activity for every work coach. Their continuous learning is supported by a range of products, for example:

- Bite size learning: available at point of need direct through the Universal Credit service
- Self-serve learning: small bespoke learning products
- Agent Led Processes: step by step instructions on how to do anything
- Guidance: the why, based on policy and the design of the service
- In-context support: on-the-page help text within the Service
- FUN updates: available within the Service and via the UC HUB communications portal
- Leader-led communications where required

14. At the heart of the ongoing learning journey is the Universal Learning site, which hosts guidance (describes the policy intent), spotlight products (which support complex service areas) and bitesize training (interactive learning products) for a broad and diverse range of complex needs and related topics. This includes (but is not limited to) care leavers, homelessness, domestic abuse, refugees, suicide and self-harm, and modern slavery, as well as consent and disclosure, financial hardship and reasonable adjustments.

Jobcentre Customer Service Manager events

15. Between April and August 2019 we are delivering events focusing on domestic abuse and homelessness to all jobcentre Customer Service Managers (CSMs). CSMs provide crucial support to customers with complex needs, and have a key role to play in identifying customers who may need additional support at any stage in the jobcentre. They are also able to help work coaches to identify and recognise the needs of customers who are experiencing domestic abuse or homelessness.

16. We’ve drawn on the expertise of a number of different partner organisations to develop these events, including Shelter, Crisis, Homeless Link, Women’s Aid and Refuge; and we are co-delivering each event with Women’s Aid.
17. During the event, CSMs engage in group table discussions about the DWP support that is available for these vulnerable customers, and think about the importance of signposting to, and building new relationships with, expert partner organisations. These full-day events help CSMs build on their existing knowledge and expertise, and equip them to be an advocate for domestic abuse and homelessness services within the jobcentre.

Work Coach Insight

18. Work Coaches play a key role in helping us improve the Universal Credit service for customers with complex needs. A robust and effective process is in place to enable work coaches to highlight and report any gaps or limitations in the Service that may impact on the support we provide for customers with complex needs. This information is used to inform and prioritise future improvements to the Service.

19. We have a national complex needs operational forum, chaired by the Area Director for Central England and Wales, with representatives from across Work and Health Services. This forum enables a broad range of service delivery colleagues, including work coaches, to share their experiences of supporting customers with complex needs. This includes local ideas and innovation which could be developed and used elsewhere, as well as any areas where they need additional support or improvements.

20. We also use insight from work coaches to help decide which parts of the Service should be an area of focus for an evidence sprint. An evidence sprint subjects a part of the Service to an intensive and detailed examination by the Universal Credit Analysis Division. An evidence sprint is based on three key elements:

1. Qualitative fieldwork – made up of interviews and visits
2. Other research and analysis
3. Support products for staff – review of guidance, training and products available, including ALPs, skills assessment tools, Universal Learning etc.

21. Each evidence sprint results in a series of recommendations for improvement. Two significant evidence sprints have already been undertaken on complex needs, and a third, on our visiting service, is in progress.

22. One example of how an evidence sprint has resulted in significant improvements is for care leavers. This led to more comprehensive guidance for work coaches; streamlined operational processes; an additional product to help colleagues correctly identify and record a care leaver’s status; and senior leader directives to appoint a care leaver Single Point of Contact (SPOC) in every office, establish a care leaver protocol (SLA) between each jobcentre and local authority, and an advanced claim process to be implemented in every site.
National Complex Needs Calls

23. To raise awareness of complex needs, we have held a series of national calls for service delivery colleagues on key topics. These have been led by a senior leader, and covered suicide and self-harm, homelessness, domestic abuse, refugees, and offenders. Each call gave some context to the issue, shared key messages about the support available for our customers, gave colleagues the opportunity to speak about their personal experiences, and highlighted the improvement activity that was underway.

Measurement

24. Finally the committee asked about the measurement of the effectiveness of these measures. In terms of adherence to the local plan, the work coach team leader, who has oversight of the work coaches will have the key role in ensuring work coaches are aware of the provision available and are making use of it appropriately. This kind of activity doesn’t lead itself easily to measurement at a national level. Indeed turning such information into measurable data is extremely difficult, something the NAO commented on in their recent study supporting disabled people. So regional and national managers, as part of their oversight function, have a key role in spotting if there are problems, spotting trends and spreading good practice between offices.

Yours Sincerely

[Signature]

Neil Couling
Senior Responsible Owner Universal Credit