Dear Amber,

Might I please seek your thoughts on reports of plans for a PR campaign for Universal Credit? An article in the Guardian today quotes a message published on the DWP’s intranet on 2 May, signed by senior officials, including Neil Couling.

1. Might you please be able to send us a copy of this message in full?

2. Were these plans submitted to you or other Ministers for your consideration, and were they approved by you or another Minister?

3. How much will the proposed communications campaign cost? If the full cost is not yet known, it would be helpful to have the costs that are known so far.

4. I know that the Department will be keen to ensure the accuracy of its communications. Will you ask Citizens Advice, who deliver your Help to Claim service, to approve the wording of any written communications—including the reported “wraparound” in the Metro—to ensure that they are clear to claimants and do not risk misleading or confusing them?

5. Might the Committee also have advance sight of any written communications?

6. Did your officials take advice from partner organisations, including Citizens Advice, on the plan for communications without DWP or UC branding? What consideration was given to the risks of confusing claimants or potential claimants about the source of this information?

   a. In the light of concerns we have heard about people losing out by moving to Universal Credit before they need to, what assessment have you made of the risk that these communications prompt claimants to act in ways that might be to their detriment?
7. Might you please let us know more about the plans for a BBC documentary about Universal Credit, and whether there might be any opportunities for the Committee to take part?

With very best wishes and I look forward to hearing from you,

Rt Hon Frank Field MP
Chair, Work and Pensions Committee