From the Chair

10 October 2018

Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People
Scottish Government

Dear Shirley-Anne

Firstly, I would like to take the opportunity to welcome you to your new role.

In August our Committee published its report on Universal Credit and domestic abuse. Our report noted that the Scottish Parliament has legislated to is splitUniversal Credit payments by default, but that the Scottish Government’s ability to deliver this rests on the DWP adapting its IT and administrative systems. We also concluded that there is no clear consensus on how precisely Universal Credit payments might best be split between members of a household. Accordingly, we recommended that:

The Department support the Scottish Government to scope out and, if appropriate, support them to pilot different approaches to split payments in Scotland as soon as possible. This might include proportional and entitlement-based models. To ensure lessons are learned from the Scottish experience the two Governments should agree to co-commission and publish a full, independent evaluation of the pilots.

In September we received the Government’s response to our report. The response noted that the Universal Credit and Social Security design teams are “working collectively to establish the practicalities of delivering split payments in Scotland”. It continues:

It is important to consider that, as a result of Scotland’s devolution powers, the method by which the Scottish Government introduce their policy is a decision for the Scottish Government to make. [...] We will continue to observe the progress of the Scottish Government in implementing their split payment

1 Universal Credit and domestic abuse: para. 75.
policy, but it would be inappropriate for the Government to comment or report on a devolved matter.

Might you please comment on the UK Government’s response to our report? In particular, it would be helpful to know:

1. Is the Department’s implication that all design choices for split payments are entirely a devolved matter accurate?

2. Have you had the full co-operation of the DWP to support you in delivering split payments, using whichever method you choose?

We will be watching your progress in implementing default split payments for Universal Credit with great interest, in the hope of learning lessons that could be applied elsewhere in the UK. We would be most grateful if you were able periodically to update us on your progress.

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

Rt Hon Frank Field MP
Chair