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29th March 2017

Thank you for your letter of the 13th March in response to my letter of the 15th February. Thank you also for sending me a summary of your estates proposals for Scotland.

I note that it is your intention to retain an accessible Jobcentre Plus service in the areas affected by closures and some of your suggested arrangements with local bus companies. I remain unclear, however, about how this will operate and would be grateful if you could share further detail – for example about the areas these arrangements will cover and the conditions for eligibility for this support.

We agreed when we met in February that, in line with Paragraph 58 of the Smith agreement, it is our shared objective to work together on possible integration opportunities for the benefit of individuals and communities.

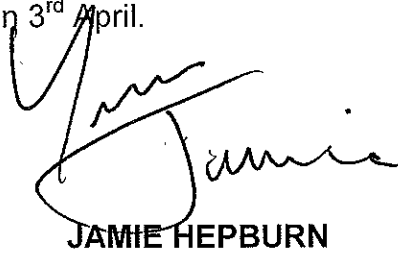
This is particularly important in the context of the Scottish Government's wider ambition to develop productive partnerships with Jobcentre Plus, local government, the 3rd Sector and other agencies to deliver effective, responsive and inclusive employment support services. We want to build on the strengths of existing national and local services to create a more collaborative approach to deliver better outcomes for people in Scotland. It is therefore critical that we determine and agree ways to link Jobcentre Plus services with Scottish employability and training support services, find ways to further join up services, and share responsibility for delivering those services.

I am keen to make progress on this issue and note that you expect to be in a better position to discuss possible opportunities once the estate situation is resolved. In particular, your letter of 7th February stated over 80% of Jobcentres in Scotland have agreed arrangements for partners to provide their services from Jobcentres and that Skills Development Scotland staff are co-located, on a part time basis, in approximately a quarter of the Jobcentres in Scotland. I am keen that we work together to understand: the locations where these arrangements exist; what services they cover; potential gaps and opportunities for building on this; and securing guarantees that similar joint working arrangements will apply to providers of future devolved employability services.

I would ask that you commit your officials to working with us to develop the detail on this, with a view to presenting progress at the next Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare.

Lastly, I welcomed your commitment at our meeting in February to open communications on the outcome of your consultations on closures in Glasgow and in Broxburn and hope I can be confident that Scottish Government and other key stakeholders in Scotland will be advised of the outcome before any public announcement is made. I should also appreciate sight of the consultation responses.

In particular, I seek clarity on when you plan to publish your response to the consultations in Scotland and your urgent assurance that this will not clash with the launch of devolved Scottish employability services on 3rd April.



JAMIE HEPBURN