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19 May 2022

Dear Richard,

### **Audit Scotland Report – Progress on implementing the devolved benefits**

I am writing in relation to the report published today by Audit Scotland, *Social Security: Progress on implementing the devolved benefits*. The report can be found at:

<https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/publications/social-security-progress-on-implementing-the-devolved-benefits>

I welcome the report and Audit Scotland's finding that we have "continued to successfully deliver new and complex social security benefits in challenging circumstances. This is a significant achievement."

Importantly, the report further recognises that we have launched "complex new benefits – including Scottish Child Payment and Child Disability Payment", as well as our most complex benefit yet, Adult Disability Payment.

The report, which notes our "significant progress on [our] programme of implementation", provides a timely opportunity to reflect on the scale of what we have achieved, with Social Security Scotland now delivering 12 benefits, seven of which are brand new, and not available anywhere else in the UK.

Given the immense challenges brought about by the pandemic, this is a very substantial achievement and I am delighted that the report recognises this. Equally, I am pleased to note that the report recognises that the Scottish Government "is preparing well for the next stages of delivery and is managing the complex programme of work effectively".

The report has been informed by many months of interaction between Audit Scotland and Social Security officials. As in previous years, Audit Scotland was provided with full access to the information they requested and this information was supplemented through a series of meetings between Audit Scotland, the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland.

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I am particularly pleased that Audit Scotland recognises the following key developments:

- Despite the challenges of the pandemic, complex benefits have been delivered including Scottish Child Payment and Child Disability Payment.
- Significant progress has been made on the Scottish Government's programme of implementation.
- The Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland are well prepared for the delivery of Adult Disability Payment, and the complex programme of work is being managed effectively.
- Our agile approach is "supporting fast-paced delivery, with real-time learning and improvement." The report recognises that "a shared understanding of the implications of the approach is developing" which help the Programme and Social Security Scotland to prioritise further development.
- Robust processes for financial monitoring are in place and longer-term plans have been developed to support this which recognises work already done on further improving oversight and controls as well as how we are building on lessons learned.
- The way we are delivering the new service is demonstrably working for the people of Scotland, with "a conscious focus on the needs of service users, building on the principles of dignity, fairness, and respect", with people being "positive about their experiences of engaging with Social Security Scotland."
- Recognition of our work on putting people at the heart of everything we do. The report says: "The programme continues to learn from existing benefit recipients through user experience panels and engagement with targeted client groups to inform its design decisions."
- "Significant new approaches to the social security system in Scotland have also been delivered". These include the launch of our new Local Delivery Service, which helps people apply for our benefits in their local communities.
- Social security "plays a key role in helping to address poverty and mitigating its effects on people".

I welcome the report's recommendations, which we are already addressing. It has acknowledged our "positive culture of learning lessons" which has allowed us to continue to refine our approach. The recommendations that Audit Scotland have highlighted are areas we had already identified and were working on prior to receipt of the report.

These include:

- The importance of publishing an updated Programme Business Case and delivery timetable which we plan to this year.
- Ensuring sufficient planning is in place for measuring benefit impacts and evaluation.
- Reviewing benefit impacts and how this links to the National Performance Framework.
- The strengthening of Social Security Scotland's role in prioritisation of development activity.

Work which was already underway and which is relevant to these recommendations includes:

- Planning to publish our revised Programme Business Case including an updated delivery timetable for the remaining benefits.
- Continuous improvement of the current service so that as we build on each benefit launch, we continue to work towards future priorities.
- Evaluating and tracking how Social Security supports the people of Scotland, as laid out in the National Performance Framework and our Charter.
- The putting in place of new contracts to support the ongoing development of new services.

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I am very grateful to Audit Scotland for their scrutiny and would be happy to provide the Committee with further detail on our progress in Social Security if it would be helpful.

Best regards,

**BEN MACPHERSON**

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