To: UC Programme Board

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Date: **16th July 2019**

Working with Stakeholders

Issue: A progress update on Stakeholder Engagement

Recommendations/Decisions required:

This paper is for discussion and information. Views from Programme Board members are invited.

Timing: Routine

Introduction

1. Since October 2018, the Universal Credit Programme Team have been making a sustained and concerted effort to engage partners and develop stakeholder relationships with a view to moving opinion on, and views of, Universal Credit. This work has also been focused on helping our stakeholders to understand which issues to focus and lobby on by explaining how we work, how the programme is designed, and the routes for escalation of issues.

2. We have held three large-scale stakeholder events: 18th October 2018, 6 March 2019, 13 June 2019. In between, there have been a number of workshops and webinars on specific issues, including communications, service design, and service delivery.

3. This work has been complemented by a programme of one-to one interventions designed to pick up issues with our strongest critics and strongest advocates. This has included face-to-face discussion both at Caxton House and at partner locations, and has also included more robust push back where we think reports or statistics are inaccurate or might benefit from clarification or further information.

4. During these events and interactions, Stakeholders have come to understand the tension between embarking on a meaningful test and learn approach to the pilot (which means accepting that we do not have a stable design to evaluate in a 'representative' way and that we must not assume solutions before they are proven) and providing parliament and others with sufficiently robust information to proceed beyond the pilot next autumn.

5. We openly recognised this tension with them at the event on 13th June at which they expressed support for helping us to resolve this tension. This positive supports means we can work with them to:

   - articulate options for moving beyond the pilot and into roll out and the possible approaches for testing the stages beyond the pilot

- manage expectations of parliament and others about what we will have learned during the pilot, what is still to be tested and how we should manage the subsequent tests

6. Interestingly it appears to be the stakeholders who most understand this approach, and who are comfortable with an iterative, test and learn approach.

7. In addition, we have continued to learn from the Help to Claim Partnership, and are exploring areas which may benefit from similar partnership activity, both within the programme and across the department – for example, we are working closely with the Money Advice Service and others to explore how we can provide better targeted debt advice, and how we can promote that within UC.

8. As we approach the first quarter reporting period for Help to Claim, in the first 10 weeks of the service, CA and CAS have helped 38,364 claimants from 941 locations, and we are learning here what works best to support our customers too, which will be useful for the pilot and beyond. The majority of people are being supported face to face, followed by phone and then web chat. Some people access the service more than once and through multiple channels. Around one third of those who have been supported so far have reported a health condition or disability. Monitoring shows increasing client satisfaction with the service, with 90% of people using the service rating their experience as 'very good' or 'fairly good'. We plan to begin evaluation at the mid-point of the service in the Autumn.

9. Within the Programme, we have also been looking to rationalise our stakeholder engagement functions. A good deal of the engagement we have undertaken in the past in upskilling and updating partners on Universal Credit can now be said to be best placed in various business-as-usual areas, be it Housing Delivery, Partnerships Managers, or local engagement functions. We are working closely with colleagues across the department to make this happen.

10. We are also finalising a forward look plan of workshops and discussions over the summer and early autumn, in order to ensure that our engagement keeps moving forward visibly and has no "gaps". It has also become apparent that may of the things that our stakeholders are lobbying for are "known about" and either in our current work programme or in our backlog. We plan to find a way to better share our workplan and explain the backlog with a small group of stakeholders over the summer.

11. Our work is bearing a good deal of fruit, both in the way that stakeholders refer to us, the acknowledgements they are making of our efforts to listen, and in their ways of working, including recently invitations to comment on and provide a "UC view" on reports prior to publication. Stakeholders are talking about our engagement in extremely positive ways – some direct quotes from our last event on June 13th are attached at Annex I.

12. Challenges remain. Turnover of staff in some stakeholder organisations is an issue: we have found that knowledge transfer is not happening where individuals have moved on and we are exploring solutions, such as a key repository on a shared platform to enable us to better induct new partners and bring them up to speed with the work so far. Some of our partners have also indicated that political changes could drive pressure from them for bigger, structural changes to UC: they have indicated that they will take advantage of PM and potential ministerial changes to push for things they are aware are not feasible. Our discussions about ways of working have greatly helped in explaining back the challenges associated with this, but we might expect lobbying activity to increase in a less certain political environment.

Summary

13. This paper has been brought to this meeting because Programme Board are asked to note and acknowledge the progress made and the shift in stakeholder views about the openness and willingness to listen to their voices and views.

14. Programme Board are also asked to note the development of plans for the next 6 months, including the rationalisation of effort to ensure that our local and national partnership work is focused wholly on our current Universal Credit stakeholder objectives, and that business-as-usual engagement finds the right home within the department.

Recommendation

15. That Programme Board supports the work so far, and might provide their views on the forward look plans.

Annex I

Feedback Examples – Universal Credit Stakeholder Event, 13/06/2019.

- *Massive difference in approach. From very closed to very open! In my experience better [engagement] than any other Department across Whitehall.*

- *Engagement has got better and better as it's gone along and is making a difference.*

- *We are encouraged that you still want to keep on talking to us as we want to talk to you.*

- *The events have improved communication between DWP and stakeholders to address issues – would have been great if it had been done earlier in the Universal Credit roll out.*

- *Service Design Workshops were incredibly useful.*

- *Like the level of support that claimants are going to get in the pilot. It's reassuring. But how can we ensure that it's taken forward and is this level of support scalable?*

- *We have been listened to and we can see that we have been listened to. ie in the clarity of the forms and simplifying things. It shows how things have been acted on when raised.*

- *There was very low trust at the 1st workshop in October 2018 – now there feels like high trust.*

- *There are Policy people in the room but no clear link with DWP policy. Policy issues are taken away from the events but we never receive feedback!*

- *There are still inconsistences in service, depending on who you speak to on the phone, claimants are consistently given different advice and don't know who to believe. More staff training.*

- *Can we have regular, frequent webinars to keep us, and others, updated on thoughts and progress of the pilot?*

- *Something is needed in the public domain with more information – like we have covered here.*

- *More feedback on issues raised and progress, was good to hear progress today but could we have updates on design as an on-going communication not just at events like this.*

(much more is available – this is a flavour of the commentary from the event)