

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Sunday 11 January 2015

Civic Scotland open letter to IDS calls for suspension of roll-out of Universal Credit

An open letter to Iain Duncan Smith – published in today’s Sunday Herald – calls on the Secretary of State to immediately suspend the roll out of Universal-Credit in Scotland, until the process of legislating for new powers for the Scottish Parliament is complete.

The letter is signed by the leaders of 57 civic organisations from across Scotland – ranging from business and finance to social care and foodbanks - and Housing Associations that are due to be part of the next stage of the roll-out of Universal Credit that is scheduled to start in February. (A full list of signatories is at the end of this press release.)

The letter says:

Dear Mr Duncan Smith,

We – the undersigned – are writing with a united voice from across Civic Scotland to call on the UK Government to immediately suspend the further implementation of Universal Credit in Scotland until the process of legislating for new powers for the Scottish Parliament is complete.

We know from the Smith Agreement that the bill for further powers that is currently being drafted will include significant new welfare powers. The detail of how these powers will interact with the Universal Credit system will be complex and require careful consideration and planning. The legislation around welfare is complex and is regularly being adapted: since the enactment of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, there have already been over 40 Statutory Instruments passed by Westminster to bring into force many of its provisions.

Any system of welfare has to be safe and secure. Driving through Universal Credit in Scotland at this stage will create unnecessary administrative complication in an already complex process.

The sensible way to roll-out Universal Credit in Scotland is to do it once, when the Scotland-specific elements have been carefully planned and incorporated into it. This would avoid wasting precious time and scarce resources, and would protect vulnerable people in our society from bureaucratic change that could wreak havoc.

A key recommendation of the Smith Commission was to significantly improve intergovernmental working between Westminster and Holyrood, this is a golden opportunity to do just that.

So we ask you to act immediately to suspend the next phase of the roll-out of Universal Credit in Scotland, before it is scheduled to start in February.

Our diverse, united voices demonstrate that our call is not about politics. It is about protecting the most vulnerable people in our society and creating an effective, robust new system for delivering welfare. Our call is about responsible, effective governance.

We would welcome the opportunity for dialogue with you on this important matter.

The open letter has been coordinated by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA). Some of its members have been part of the pilot of Universal Credit and more will be affected as it is rolled out. Mary Taylor, Chief Executive of the SFHA said:

“With the next phase of Universal Credit due to be rolled out in February Iain Duncan Smith MP still has time to take the decision to suspend that process in Scotland, and the Smith Agreement gives him a legitimate reason to do that. With the backing of so many respected voices from across Civic Scotland, we hope the Secretary of State will choose to give further

time for the new Scottish powers to be integrated into Universal Credit, thus protecting the most vulnerable people in our society and creating an effective, robust new system for delivering welfare.”

The signatories to the open letter are:

Age Scotland - Brian Sloan, CEO
 Business for Scotland - Brandon Malone, Interim Chair
 Church of Scotland - Rt Rev John Chalmers, Moderator of the General Assembly
 Coalition of Care Support Providers in Scotland - Annie Gunner Logan, Director,
 Common Weal - The Board
 Constitutional Commission - John Drummond, Chairman
 Council of Mortgage Lenders - Kennedy Foster, Policy Consultant, Scotland
 Cyrenians - Ewan Aitken, CEO
 Development Trusts Association - Ian Cooke, Director
 East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel - Mark Ormiston, Chair Person
 Edinburgh Tenants Federation - Betty Stevenson, Convenor
 Engender - Emma Ritch, Executive Director
 Food Train - Michelle McCrindle, CEO
 Glasgow & West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations - David Bookbinder, Director
 Health & Social Care Alliance Scotland - Ian Welsh, CEO
 Inclusion Scotland - Bill Scott, Director of Policy
 Money Advice Scotland - Yvonne MacDermid OBE, CEO
 Quarriers - Alice Drife, CEO
 Scottish Association of Social Work - Trisha Hall, Country Manager
 Scottish Children's Services Coalition - Sophie Pilgrim, Member
 Scottish Community Alliance - Angus Hardie, Director
 Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations - Martin Sime, CEO
 Scottish Federation of Housing Associations – Mary Taylor, CEO
 Scottish Out of School Care Network - Irene Audain MBE, CEO
 Scottish Trade Unions Council - David Moxham, Deputy General Secretary
 Scottish Women's Aid - Lily Greenan, CEO
 Sense Scotland - Andy Kerr, CEO
 Social Enterprise Scotland - Fraser Kelly, CEO
 Social Firms Scotland - Pauline Graham, CEO
 St Martins Parish Pastoral Council, Tranent - Fr James Smith. Parish Priest
 The Equality Network - Tim Hopkins, Director
 The Jimmy Reid Foundation - Bob Thomson, Convener
 The Poverty Alliance Peter Kelly, Director
 The Wise Group - Laurie Russell, CEO
 The Trussell Trust - David McAuley, CEO
 Turning Point Scotland - Martin Cawley, CEO
 Who Cares? Scotland - Duncan Dunlop, CEO
 Voluntary Action Scotland - Calum Irving, CEO
 Voluntary Health Scotland - Claire Stevens, CEO
 YouthLink Scotland - Jim Sweeney, CEO
 Zero Tolerance - Laura Tomson, Co-director

Signatories from Housing Associations in Scotland that are due to be part of the next stage of the Universal Credit roll-out:

ARK Housing Association - Jane Gray, CEO
 Barony Housing Association - Rebecca Wilson, CEO
 Bield Housing & Care - Brian Logan, CEO
 Blackwood - Fanchea Kelly, CEO
 Cairn Housing Association - Jason MacGilp, CEO
 Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association - Alister Steele, Managing Director
 Dunedin Canmore Group - Ewan Fraser, CEO
 Hanover (Scotland) Housing Association – Helen Murdoch, CEO
 Knowes Housing Association - Pierre De Fence, Director
 Lister Housing Co-operative - Alistair Cant, Director
 Manor Estates Housing Association - Lynn McDonald, Director



Melville Housing Association - Andrew Noble, CEO
Prospect Community Housing - Brendan Fowler, Director
Trafalgar Housing Association - *Paul McShane*, Director
Trust Housing Association - Bob McDougall, CEO
West Granton Housing Co-operative - Gerry Gillies, CEO

Ends

For further information, contact

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NOTES:

1. The full letter is attached to this email.
2. Download the SFHA's full submission to the Smith Commission here http://www.sfha.co.uk/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&qid=636&Itemid=340
3. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) was established in 1975 and has around 120 members providing affordable housing and wider community services across Scotland, as well as a further 200 commercial associates. The SFHA is owned and governed by its members and exists to lead, represent and support the work of housing associations and co-operatives throughout Scotland www.sfha.co.uk
4. Housing associations and co-operatives are not-for-profit bodies regulated by the Scottish Housing Regulator.