



**The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh, EH99 1SP**

Rt Hon Esther McVey MP
Department for Work & Pensions,
Caxton House,
Tothill Street,
London,
SW1H 9NA

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Dear Esther McVey,

We are writing to express concern about growing evidence of DWP staff being put under pressure to sanction people – and the DWP's apparent unwillingness to take action on this.

A recent survey from the PCS union of its members indicated that 25% believed that they had been given a target and 82% felt that they were under pressure to suggest more people who could be sanctioned.

In addition to this, Bill Scott, director of policy at Inclusion Scotland, has said: "...there is a bit of sophistry within DWP when it says that no targets exist, no league tables exist and so on. In fact, that is what is happening in practice. I have messages on my mobile phone from Public and Commercial Services Union members who have been taken into disciplinary meetings to be told that they are being disciplined because they have not imposed enough sanctions. Other PCS members have been told that they will not be getting their annual uplift in pay—their increment—because they have not sanctioned sufficient people in the last year."

With organisations including the Trussell Trust linking the rise in foodbank use to the rising use of sanctions, it is imperative that claims of staff being put under pressure to sanction are investigated.

On Tuesday of this week, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland, David Mundell MP, gave evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Welfare Reform Committee. During the session he was asked about reports of pressure on staff to sanction and completely failed to address the question, responding only to say that staff he had spoken to had not raised this issue with him. In our view, that response is not acceptable.

DWP ministers have turned down invitations to appear in front of the Welfare Committee on a total of eight occasions and getting explanations from the UK Government on issues of welfare reform has been a challenge.

We ask that this request is given due consideration as it is unacceptable for DWP staff to feel pressurised to sanction some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

Yours Sincerely,

Kevin Stewart MSP
Christina McKelvie MSP
Joan McAlpine MSP
Clare Adamson MSP