

To: Jane MacLeod [GRO]; Paula Vennells [GRO] Melanie
Corfield [GRO] Mark Underwood1 [GRO] Rodric
Williams [GRO] Jane Hill [GRO] Tom Wechsler [GRO] Angela
Van-Den-Bogerd [GRO]
From: Mark R Davies [GRO]
Sent: Wed 15 Jul 2015 7:18:56 PM (UTC)
Subject: Re: MP meeting

Apologies, adding Angela

Mark Davies
Communications and Corporate Affairs Director
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Mobile: [GRO]

On 15 Jul 2015, at 20:17, Mark R Davies <[GRO]> wrote:

All

Patrick and I met with Andrew Bridgen MP and Kevan Jones MP today, at a meeting chaired by Baroness Neville-Rolfe.

The meeting was held up as Mr Jones was late. Mr Bridgen then ran through his central points.

This included no new allegations and was broadly a repeat of his adjournment debate script. He raised some new unnamed cases where he alleged there had been unfair treatment of postmasters.

He accused the Post Office of:

- abusing its prosecution powers and using plea bargaining to "cajole" people into accepting guilty pleas
- curtailing Second Sight's work and the mediation scheme
- reducing scope of SS work and forcing SS to moderate its reports
- not co-operating with SS
- having "Dickensian" contract arrangements with postmasters, "suspicious" suspense account procedure and an inadequate helpline
- using Bracknell and remote access to target and implicate postmasters of wrongdoing

Mr Jones endorsed the above and accused the Post Office of:

- using the mediation scheme as a smokescreen to pass the statute of limitations
- a deliberate and planned cover up
- "leaning" on SS
- "gagging" Panorama

He accused Patrick and I of lying to him and Mr Bridgen in the meeting. We did not.

The MPs asked the minister:

- to call an independent inquiry
- to meet with Second Sight

They asked us:

- to provide details of how much we had paid out to settle claims

We agreed:

- to write to both MPs reiterating our offer to meet (Mr Bridgen said he would put this to his constituent: Mr Jones rebuffed the offer)

It was a very unpleasant meeting at which Patrick and I were robust but respectful in making our case in face of an approach which was volatile and at times aggressive. There was no interest from either MP in listening to our position. Mr Jones refused to shake hands at the end.

The MPs made personal attacks on colleagues within Post Office and beyond. They insisted that the BIS select committee would return to the issue.

BNR agreed to meet James Arbuthnot. She did not agree to meet Second Sight.

COMMENT

This was a very difficult meeting. We now need to ensure the minister understands the position. While she was supportive, there is a risk that the complexity of the issue plus MP interpretation of that complexity, causes the search for simple "solutions" which we know do not exist.

We repeated our offer to go through their individual cases with MPs over and over again, so that they might have the benefit of the full facts. 'We don't trust you' was their rejoinder.

They relentlessly pushed on how many cases we have mediated and what settlements we have paid. Within the boundaries of what we were able to say, we referenced that some cases had been resolved and settlements went across a range.

They were insistent that they should be able to meet with Second Sight but we had no doubt "gagged them". We pointed out that they had written 2 reports which were widely available but that they had no locus on these disputes. "What have you got to hide..."

The only good thing to come out of it, partly thanks to the Minister's persistence, was an acceptance by Bridgen that he would meet us with Rudkin if the latter agreed.

The Minister did appear to agree that it would be rather difficult to make progress if the MPs refused to engaged with the rest of the story.

We will meet with BIS officials to discuss next steps which will include writing to the MPs to reiterate the offer to meet. We are also actively exploring other avenues to get the facts a wider audience.

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