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Baroness Neville-Rolfe DBE CMG
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
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11 August 2015

Thank you for your time on Thursday 6 August 2015. I hope you found the meeting useful. It was certainly very helpful from our perspective.

I thought it might be helpful as a follow-up if I gave you some more details of our planned approach with regard to those applications to the Complaint Review and Mediation scheme where we are hoping applicants will re-engage.

As you know, a Panorama programme is due to air on Monday 17 August 2015. Ahead of that, having already engaged MPs with the report from the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution, we plan to write again to applicants urging them to engage with CEDR and to arrange a time for mediation to take place.

In doing so we will refer to the key points from the CEDR report in order to support applicants as they consider their next steps. We will do so carefully and clearly in order to underline our commitment to the process.

We will stress that the Post Office is of course very sorry that some of those who applied to the Scheme may feel that they have been treated unfairly by the business in the past.

As you know, we believe we have made every effort to consider their grievances and provide an avenue for them to be heard. Nonetheless we do regret of course that our efforts in good faith may not been received as such.

We appreciate that some applicants may feel the Scheme has not worked as they had hoped, and that they have concerns about the Post Office's approach. I do not agree with this assessment but do of course accept the fact that some may have a different view. This is partly why we asked CEDR to produce their updated report: to provide applicants with more guidance about how mediation is working and how it can work most effectively.

As you will know mediation has led to resolution in a number of cases, but not in all: that is the nature of the process. My view is that whatever the other considerations in the minds of applicants, it is surely worth them engaging in mediation on its own

merits. We also believe it offers both parties with the best opportunity to reach agreement.

Not doing so will simply result in the applicants losing an entirely additional and cost-free opportunity to resolve their complaints. Agreeing to mediate in no way prevents these applicants from taking further action at a later stage if mediation is not successful. If they find they cannot reach an agreement with Post Office, their position remains unchanged and they remain free to explore all other avenues open to them.

We recognise that some people will not be familiar with mediation and what it involves. We want to ensure that people are able to make an informed choice about whether or not they wish to take part. In our letter to applicants, as well as including CEDR's contact details, we have also directed applicants to CEDR's "POC 4 – Mediation Procedure", which was designed to give people taking part in mediation an understanding of how it works. As you know we are also offering funding for independent advice prior to any mediation taking place.

We have asked applicants to engage with CEDR by 4 September 2015. This date is important in order that we and CEDR can plan ahead, but should any applicant who decides not to re-engage subsequently have a change of heart any outstanding issues will be taken forward in accordance with standard business practices.

We sincerely hope that applicants to the scheme who are not currently engaging with the mediation process will consider the points we will raise with them over the coming days. They are made out of a genuine desire to support those individuals who may believe they have been treated unfairly and provide them with an opportunity to set out their case.

In relation to those cases which have been referred to the Criminal Cases Review Commission, we believe that the commission must be allowed to complete its review.

I hope this letter is helpful. My team stands ready of course to work with BIS officials as appropriate over the coming weeks and months.

Paula Vennells
Chief Executive