

DRAFT LETTER TO JAMES ARBUTHNOT

James,

Thank you for your letter of 1 May about the Initial Complaint Review and Mediation Scheme (the Scheme).

Interim Report

I have considered your suggestion with regard to the interim report. I am afraid that I am still of the opinion that now is not the right time to circulate such a report. Although Second Sight did intend to produce their report in March, they have not yet been able to provide a full draft. So far, they have only produced an extract of an early draft of the thematic report for the Working Group's consideration, in early April. That report was such an early draft that it was not in a state which the Working Group could sensibly consider. As far as I am aware, no further progress has been made.

Progress to date

I believe Post Office's commitment to the Scheme is demonstrated by the substantial resources we have committed to it, including:

- a. paying professional advisors to help each applicant complete the Case Questionnaire Review needed for the Scheme.
- b. appointing 22 investigators to work on the cases along with a dedicated programme team to support the Scheme.
- c. paying Second Sight and JFSA to take part in the Working Group and paying Second Sight to investigate each case.

Whilst it has taken Post Office longer to progress investigations than we originally envisaged, we have now:

- a. received 77 detailed applications
- b. completed investigations in 22 cases
- c. produced 16 reports and submitted them to the Working Group
- d. 42 cases currently under investigation.

Case progress

I am also able to inform you that the first draft Second Sight case review is due to be released to the relevant Scheme applicant on Monday (12 May). This is a significant milestone in the progress of the Scheme.

Alan Bates Letter

I am aware that you have also received a copy of some correspondence between Alan Bates and Jenny Willott MP. It is worth noting that the Working Group Chair has felt that he should write to the Minister correcting some inaccuracies in Mr Bates' letter. I felt though, that I ought to also make you aware of the key issues I have with the letter and its accuracy which, it seems to me, may undermine the proper operation of the Working Group (and, in turn, the Scheme itself).

1. Contrary to the Working Group's Terms of Reference, the content of the letter discloses outside the Working Group information which is confidential to the members of the Working Group.
2. It contains several factual inaccuracies and paints a picture which is inconsistent with both the current and historic position. For example Post Office had produced 20 reports for the Working Group's consideration at the date Mr Bates wrote, rather than none, as Mr Bates says in his letter.
3. The fact that Mr Bates has bypassed the structure of the Working Group to raise concerns is particularly disappointing and contrary to the spirit of the Working Group.

Moving Forward

I remain committed to considering all of the cases that have been brought to Post Office's attention through the Scheme, but like you, I am concerned that the pace of delivery of the Second Sight reports means that the Scheme may take longer than either you or I would wish. I am actively engaged in trying to resolve this issue and would welcome the opportunity to update you in person on my thinking. To that end, please do let me know if and when you are available to meet. I would therefore be grateful if you would refrain from circulating our correspondence at this point, as I feel we would be better able to decide how best to take forward updating MPs after we have spoken.

PV