

DRAFT LETTER TO JAMES ARBUTHNOT

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

I share your anxieties around the progress of the Scheme, and appreciate the concerns this will create for other interested MPs while we are unable to update them on the emerging conclusions. We remain determined to investigate the cases as quickly as possible, which is why we have committed substantial resources including paying professional advisers to help the applicants, appointing a team of 22 investigators alongside our dedicated programme team, and paying Second Sight to investigate each case. To date we have received 77 detailed applications, and have completed our investigations in 22 of these cases with the others currently underway.

However, the pace of delivery of the Second Sight reports means that the overall Scheme is still progressing more slowly than either your or I would wish. The first draft Second Sight case review is due to be submitted early next week - a significant milestone, but it also highlights the substantial volume of work that still needs to be completed. I am actively engaged in trying to resolve this issue and would welcome the opportunity to update you in person on my thinking. My office will be in touch with yours to find a suitable date. I would suggest you hold off circulating our correspondence until this point, as I feel we would be better able to decide how best to keep MPs updated after we have spoken.

In terms of the interim report you refer to in your letter, although Second Sight did originally intend to produce a draft in March they have not yet been able to complete this. So far they have only produced an extract of an early draft of the thematic report which the Working Group reviewed in early April. That report was such an early draft that it was not in a state which the Working Group could sensibly consider or recommend for publication. We are awaiting an update on further progress.

There is one last issue which I would like to take this opportunity to address. I am aware that you have 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 too have written to the Minister outlining my own concerns with Mr Bates letter, which risks undermining the proper operation of the Working Group (and, in turn, the Scheme itself). In particular:

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.

I look forward to meeting with you soon to discuss how we can best work towards our shared objective of a swift and orderly resolution of the cases which have been submitted to the Scheme.