

Message

From: Paula Vennells [GRO]
Sent: 13/06/2012 22:19:06
To: james.arbuthnot.mp [GRO]
Subject: Fwd: Message from James Arbuthnot to Alice Perkins and Paul Vennells

Dear James, thank you for your care and attention to this. It is critical we resolve it properly and I am grateful to you.

Firstly, let me reassure you that Altice and I intend total transparency - as I'm sure you sensed from the meeting we arranged for you and Oliver.

Secondly, the queries you raise are entirely valid: the reason I had wanted to meet face to face on Monday was to talk this through. Each case as you saw with your own and with Oliver's, is different. We are dealing with particularly sensitive and personal situations, as well as with a combination of fact and misunderstandings. (And in some cases, as we explained, fiction and/or fraud.)

Rather than a blanket approach, we would take each case separately - we are dealing with individuals' lives and livelihoods. But, the guarantee for each one is complete transparency and handled in the most appropriate and sensitive way. Therefore in some, we may need to go further than the draft TOR suggests, with SubPostmasters in joint meetings; in others, that might be difficult and/or embarrassing for them and their MPs. We would however, start with each MP in order to explain/explore the background.

Thank you for reminding me about summer Recess - of course, we will work to a timetable that suits.

As regards, your draft release, my view is that it would not be without risk both in terms of human sensitivities and reputational distortions. There are reasons for this which I am happy to share.

I hope this helps clarify and reassure. That said, I do think it would help both of us to meet up before Monday; I will make this a priority and rearrange my diary to accommodate yours. Theresa or Alwen will be in touch with Janet first thing tomorrow.

Kind regards,

Paula

Ps. Alice is away on holiday this week, hence I am replying for both of us. (We discussed the issue of transparency before she left. As you would expect, Alice is committed to the primacy of this. She is also very aware of the risks and sensitivities of how we handle the individual cases.)

Dear Alice and Paula,

Thank you for sending me your proposed terms of reference - they are most helpful.

A couple of issues have struck me and I wonder if you might give me your thoughts on them please? The first is that you are proposing that meetings should be held with MPs but not necessarily with the relevant subPostmasters there to put their side of the story. And MPs will not know as much as the subPostmasters will, and so the issue will not be resolved unless the MPs are also given the chance to have their constituents at the meeting. What about their advisers? Surely they ought to be included as well? Since we are trying to clear the matter up in (as I suggest in my draft press release) a robust and transparent manner, it does seem to me that this needs further thought.

In addition, the timing which the terms of reference propose really will not suit MPs, all of whom will be on summer Recess. Whilst I understand and agree with the need to sort this problem out swiftly, it is going to be exceedingly difficult to do so given the fact that MPs and their constituents will be taking holidays just at the time meetings are meant to be taking place.

In the light of all this I attach a draft press release. Would you consider this draft, and let me have your thoughts? Depending on the outcome of the meeting, I would be looking at issuing this the next day, so if we could agree a skeleton at this stage, and tighten on the Tuesday following the meeting ready for release that afternoon, this would work well.

Could you possibly give these things some thought, and come back to me?

Yours ever,

James

Office of the Rt Hon James Arbuthnot, MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Website: www.jamesarbuthnot.com

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