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Thank you to you and Tim Parker for meeting with me on Monday 16th March and your letter dated 20th March. In this letter I have responded to some of the points raised in your letter regarding the Coronavirus response and guidance. I will aim to respond more fully to the reminder of your points next week.

Coronavirus update

We are currently experiencing the biggest public health emergency in living memory with the outbreak of the virus, and we are doing everything we can to tackle the pandemic and mitigate its impact. I want to assure you that the sustainability of the Post Office network is of upmost importance to the Government.

First, I would like to thank you and your colleagues for your cooperation with my officials and wider Government so far on COVID-19 contingency planning to help maintain access to services through the Post Office network and the steps taken to signpost postmasters to relevant Government guidance and reliefs for small businesses. With 110 branches closed so far and potentially more to follow, I also recognise the steps Post Office Limited has taken in these unprecedented times to provide postmasters with support beyond the routine offer.

Whilst I am pleased that we have ensured that the Government classification of keyworkers includes staff delivering postal services, I recognise that you require further advice and guidance on a number of matters, as raised in your letter.

I assure you that my officials and I are advocating the significance and role of the Post Office network in providing essential services to inform central decisions and will provide further information as soon as we are able to. I also understand that my officials are in daily contact with your teams and working with relevant Covid-19 teams to address your queries as they arise.

I am also aware of your engagement with DWP to ensure vulnerable customers who rely on the Post Office Card Account (POCa) can access their pension and benefits. I can confirm that Minister for Pension has been briefed on your proposal and is due to make a decision soon. I would like to thank you for being proactive and pragmatic in this matter.

Historical Shortfall Scheme

I am pleased that the Post Office engaged with claimants in the settled litigation on the design of the Historical Shortfalls Scheme as it is of great importance to Government that this scheme is delivered in a fair, open and transparent way. With regard to the planned announcement of the Scheme on Monday 23rd March, I am concerned that as the media is currently focused on COVID-19 developments, that the news may not be acknowledged as widely as we had hoped. I would like to hear your plans to mitigate this risk given how important a step this scheme is in Post Office's plans to deliver on its commitments following the litigation settlement and rebalancing the relationship with postmasters. It is important that this scheme is communicated as openly and transparently as possible.

Finally, I would be grateful for clarity on whether Post Office has plans in place for any claimants whose convictions are overturned as a result of the Criminal Cases Review Commissions (CCRC) process. These claimants will miss out on the Historic Shortfall Scheme during the three-month period it will be open for applications. Any information you can provide on this would be greatly appreciated.

PAUL SCULLY MP

Minister for Small Business, Consumers & Corporate Responsibility