

OUTLINE HANDLING STRATEGY FOR SPARROW

Aim To get on the front foot and mitigate against reputational challenge following a decision to offer mediation to all applicants in the Scheme where there is no Court decision involved. This will ensure that the applicants whose cases have not previously been dealt with in the Courts can move to a swifter conclusion. For those cases which have been the subject of a courts decision, mediation cannot provide a resolution but applicants are able to pursue the legal avenues open to them.

Objectives

Explain position, limit media coverage, manage stakeholders to minimise adverse comment or further campaigning, minimise parliamentary risk, limit on-going reputational exposure.

Tactics:

- A simple press statement supported by publication of Post Office report on the process.
- Likelihood and timing of a Select Committee report is a key consideration. No further hearings will be held and given time restrictions prior to purdah, whether a report will be produced is in the balance
- However, the greater risk is Second Sight's Part Two Report. Leaking or publication would put us on the back foot, and make any announcement to change the Scheme appear reactive.
- The sooner we announce, the more likely we are to "own" the story

Key messages

- Post Office now intends to offer mediation to all applicants in the Scheme where there is no Court decision involved.
- This will speed up the process and provide further reassurance for the majority applicants that their case will be mediated.
- We have now investigated every case. The minority of cases in the Scheme that involve criminal convictions have all been subject to the same rigorous investigation as other cases. No evidence has been found or put forward that suggests any convictions are unsafe.
- The Scheme and mediation cannot overturn criminal convictions – only the Courts can do that.
- We are making this change so that we can focus on fulfilling our commitments to applicants. That is where our focus must lie.

- Each applicant will continue to have exactly what we promised – thorough reinvestigation and review by independent forensic accountants.

Resources

- List of media targets
- List of political targets
- Press statement
- Q&A (for internal use)
- Post Office Report
- Email to MPs with a case in the Scheme
- Letters to applicants
- Briefing for NFSP (121 – Mark Davies)

Strategy/Timeline

when	What	how	who
Day -5	Brief Minister and officials		TW
Day -2	Inform SAH		PV/CA/JM
Day -1	Send letter to applicants		Sparrow team
Day -1	Brief NFSP		PV
Day -1	Written Ministerial Question tabled		BIS/TW
Day 0	Inform SS		
Day 0	Inform JFSA		
Day 0	Applicants receive letter		
Day 0	Press notice setting out our position – simple, factual, high level.	proactive issue to all media. Or issue to PA only.	MC/RB
Day 0	Written Ministerial Statement		BIS/TW
Day 0	Brief Kevan Jones MP	Phone call	JH
Day 0	Brief all MPs in the Scheme to offer further meetings	Email	JH
Day 0	Brief supportive MPs, All Party Group (Russell Brown MP, Richard Graham MP), MPs who spoke in WH debate (but not in the scheme)	Email	JH
Day 0	Inform Opposition spokesman (Ian Murray MP)	Phone call	JH
Day 0	Inform Select Committee Chair	Phone call	JH
Day 0	Inform Select Committee Clerk	Email PO Report and press notice	JH
Day 0	Publish Post Office Report	PO website	

Risks

Risk	Mitigation
Widespread adverse media:	Proactive media approach
SS Part Two Report:	Early POL announcement.
Urgent Question tabled in Parliament	Written ministerial statement
Select committee report is negative:	Proactive, early media approach
Select committee may convene a further session	Unlikely given number of concurrent inquiries
Incoming minister orders inquiry	Risk exists in all scenarios, mitigated if change announced earlier