Thank you for your letter dated 13 September 2018 on behalf of the Defence Committee raising your concerns surrounding the continuing press reports of former LECs in Afghanistan who are subject to an apparently oppressive level of intimidation.

Taking your questions in turn:

1. **Are you confident in light of these continued reports that the system of risk assessment used in the LEC schemes is sufficiently robust and reflects the situation on the ground, in Kabul and elsewhere?**

I am confident that the method of conducting risk assessments is robust and that the policy is applied appropriately. Initial assessments of Intimidation claims are conducted within 24 hours of the first report to determine whether the individual is under immediate threat, in which case they are temporarily relocated using funds provided by us whilst their claim is being investigated. Former LECs are advised to contact the Afghan National Police if there is an immediate threat to their safety as the UK has no responsibility for security around Afghanistan. Our Investigative Officer post is always filled by a member of the Ministry of Defence Police or Home Office Constabulary appropriately trained and experienced in criminal investigation.

Interviews are arranged to address considerations of urgency and local staff safety. They take place face-to-face at Hamid Karzai International Airport or the British Embassy, where possible, and are otherwise conducted by phone. It would not be appropriate for the investigator to go to the individual as a Westerner would face risks far greater than those faced by locals. There would also be an increased risk to local staff if they were seen out in their community with Westerners. However, our experience, and that of our coalition partners, is that it is possible to conduct effective investigations of claims. Interviews are also conducted with key witnesses, again either face-to-face where possible or by phone. The Investigative Officer also analyses any

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key evidence presented as part of the claim in accordance with the Authorised Policing Practice used in the UK, including direct examination of any medical or threat evidence (letter or mobile phone data).

The front line in Afghanistan was defined as Helmand. A concerted effort was made not to employ individuals from the local area, and to accommodate these individuals on bases to reduce the risk of their being identified through working with the UK. Kabul was considered a much safer place to work... The Government remains confident that the UK’s arrangements for addressing intimidation concerns meet our commitment to protect our former LECs. We are not aware of any former LEC who has been killed or injured having contacted the Intimidation Investigation Unit (IIU) with a concern about employment-related intimidation.

In the cases examined by the Assurance Committee, members have made some small recommendations for procedural improvements, which have been accepted and implemented. They have yet to find anyone whose level of risk was underestimated or whose life or security was threatened as a result. This would indicate that the present arrangements are fit for purpose. We have good evidence that there are a number of locations in Afghanistan, including Kabul, where former LECs can live safely and openly without threat resulting from their previous employment. However, security is a changing situation and we keep it under careful review.

2. **What is the target timescale for new applications under the revised eligibility criteria of the EGS?**

Any new applications have been submitted to the team based in Kabul and are currently being processed in close consultation with PJHQ in order to meet our target date for a decision by the end of December 2018.

3. **How many new applications have been received since the amendment of the eligibility criteria?**

We have so far received approximately 300 new applications and we are reviewing all our 7,000 employment records for former LECs to assess eligibility, not only those who apply.

4. **Has the IIU received further resources to process new applications following the amendment of the eligibility criteria?**

The IIU is not responsible for processing new applications, as they manage the implementation of the Intimidation policy and not the EGS. The responsibility falls to the LEC policy lead in Kabul and the team in PJHQ. We will respond to all new applicants by the end of December informing them of the decision on their eligibility for relocation to the UK. To support this task, we have provided two additional members of staff as a surge capacity for a period of four months. We also recognise the need to conduct a thorough comprehensive review of the personnel files for
all former LECs. This work will be conducted alongside the processing of applications received. We have applied additional resource to ensure quick decisions on eligibility.

5. What information is provided to new applicants under the revised EGS and how regularly are they updated about the status of their applications?

New applicants are informed of the revised eligibility criteria at the point they submit their application. They are informed that they must have been directly employed by HMG, have been in employment on or after 01 May 2006, have worked on the frontline outside of the wire in Helmand for a minimum of 12 months continuously and have been made redundant or medically discharged unfit for duty as a result of injury arising from action whilst on operations. We will also publish regular updates on the EGS policy page on the data.gov website which will outline how many applications we have received and how many of these have been given decisions. We will refer any applicants to the website emphasising the scale and complexity of the task, noting that the team will be in touch to inform them of their eligibility when a decision is reached. We try to operate a reasonable minimum of direct contact with former LECs because of the risks this would present.

6. On what grounds (e.g. for alleged desertion) are individuals who would normally be eligible for either LEC scheme barred from applying? Is there any opportunity for a former LEC who has been barred to appeal this decision?

As noted above, for individuals to be eligible for relocation to the UK under the revised EGS criteria they must have been directly employed by HMG, have been in employment on or after 01 May 2006, have worked on the frontline outside of the wire in Helmand for a minimum of 12 months continuously and have been made redundant or medically discharged unfit for duty as a result of injury arising from action whilst on operations. Individuals who do not meet this criterion are therefore not eligible. If they have evidence to appeal then we would strongly encourage them to contact the team in Kabul and present their evidence, which will be considered thoroughly.

THE RT HON GAVIN WILLIAMSON CBE MP