Dear Chair,

I am writing at the suggestion of Wendy Williams about responses that I gave to the Public Accounts Committee on 17 December when I appeared before you in relation to the Windrush Generation.

In reply to questions about why the Department had not acted at the time in response to the ‘Chasing Status’ report published in 2014, and a Foreign Office telegram in 2016, I said that the Department took the view that the right place to consider these questions was in Wendy Williams’ Independent Lessons Learned Review.

I went on to say that Wendy Williams’ work was the right place ‘to come up with a definitive account of what happened and when, who knew what, when, and how this came about’, and that Wendy Williams would provide a ‘detailed and forensic account’.

I said that what we have done to try to resolve these issues of “How did this mess happen? How did this scandal happen?” is to ask an independent figure - Wendy Williams - to do a detailed forensic review.

I realise that these comments could be interpreted as implying that one of the purposes of the Independent Lessons Learned Review is to apportion blame, and I want to clarify them by referring to the Terms of Reference. The aim is stated as:

“To provide an independent assessment of the events leading up to the Windrush issues (particularly from 2008 – March 2018) and to identify the key lessons for the Home Office going forward.”

The objectives are:

(i) What were the key legislative, policy and operational decisions which led to members of the Windrush Generation becoming entangled in measures designed for illegal immigrants;

(ii) What other factors played a part;

(iii) Why these issues were not identified sooner;
(iv) What lessons the organisation can learn to ensure it does things differently in future;
(v) Whether corrective measures are now in place, and if so, an assessment of their initial impact;
(vi) What (if any) further recommendations should be made for the future.

I also attach the Methodology of the Review.

Given the emphasis on lessons learned, the Review has not been asked to apportion blame in relation to individuals.

I should add that if, in light of the Review, there are further issues that merit investigation in relation to the conduct of individuals under the Civil Service Code, I will of course consider further steps that may be appropriate.

Yours sincerely,

Sir Philip Rutnam
Permanent Secretary