Meg Hillier MP
Chair – Public Accounts Committee

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letter of 2 September 2019, requesting further clarity on the Department’s plans for the Historical Cases Review and outreach to affected communities. I have endeavoured to address your points below.

As we have set out previously to the Committee, the Historical Cases Review was established to answer specific questions from Parliament as to the number of Windrush individuals who had been detained, removed from the UK or subject to compliant environment sanctions. There is no straight-forward way to answer these questions, as we are limited by the information held on our systems and how that information can be extracted. The Historical Cases Review was therefore established to answer these questions as best it could. From an extensive manual trawl of approximately 15,000 records relating to Caribbean nationalities, which took approximately 150 staff several months to complete, a total of 221 individuals whose records indicated they arrived in the UK before 1973 were identified. The previous Home Secretary wrote personal apology letters to 67 of these individuals who we consider are most likely to have suffered detriment and the details of all 221 individuals were passed to the Windrush Taskforce who sought to contact those who were not already in touch with the Department. However, the review was not intended to be the primary mechanism for providing redress to all potentially affected individuals.

The Windrush Taskforce and the Compensation Scheme are the primary mechanisms established by the Department to provide redress to affected individuals. To date, over 4,000 individuals have been granted documentation confirming their status by the Commonwealth Citizens Taskforce, and over 4,600 have been granted citizenship. These volumes are significantly higher than the number of individuals identified by the review. This points to both the importance and effectiveness of communications and engagement activity to reach as many affected individuals as possible, but also the clear limitations of the scope of the Historical Cases Review irrespective of the issue of nationality.

Were the Department to extend the Historical Cases Review to other nationalities, it would be required to look at individuals of all nationalities, not just those of other Commonwealth countries. This is because all nationalities benefited from the indefinite leave to remain provisions in the Immigration Act 1971 if settled in the UK before January 1973. This would bring the total number of additional cases requiring review to approximately 300,000 electronic records. We estimate that this would take approximately 200 case workers over two years to complete, at a
cost of over £20m. This still would not identify all individuals affected in all ways by Windrush issues, due to the limitations of the information held by the Department as set out above.

However, as your letter notes, we are currently awaiting the findings of Wendy Williams’ Lessons Learned Review and think it prudent to consider these findings before taking a final decision on whether to close the Historical Cases Review. I commit to providing a further update to the Committee regarding this decision once we have had the opportunity to consider the outcome of the review.

In the meantime, we continue to focus our efforts on outreach and engagement activity to ensure individuals of all nationalities affected in all ways are able to get the help and support they require. For example, to support the launch of the Compensation Scheme on 3 April, there was an initial three-month period of communications activity. In designing this programme of activity, we spoke to people from a wide range of communities, including and beyond the Caribbean, such as people of Nigerian, Pakistani and Jamaican heritage, so that we could understand more about their concerns and how best to raise awareness of the schemes. Between April and June, 12 compensation scheme engagement events were organised and held across the UK by the Home Office and officials attended another five events organised by trusted community organisations.

Representatives from the Commonwealth Taskforce are always present at these events to talk to people about the Windrush Scheme. This is in addition to the one-to-one surgeries they also hold across the country. These engagement events were held in locations such as Lambeth, Nottingham, Southampton and Birmingham. We also worked with local stakeholders to raise awareness of these events through the equalities departments in local authorities and via community and religious organisations, as well as alerting local MPs offices. To promote the launch more widely press notices were issued, articles offered to key diaspora publications and social media activity implemented.

Alongside this activity, the Home Office recently completed analysis into groups of people who may have been affected by Windrush issues and where they might be in the country. This was done to inform where further outreach could usefully be targeted to optimise its impact. This analysis compared multiple data sources, including 2011 census data on individuals without UK passports who arrived in the UK before 1988 and internal sources (such as data on those who have already successfully applied for documentation through the Windrush Scheme). Through this we identified potential priority groups with particular socio-economic and demographic characteristics within specific nationalities, (in addition to those from the Caribbean), to target for outreach and communication to other nationalities, including Bangladeshi, Ghanaian, Indian, Nigerian and Pakistani. It also provided an evidence base for locations to target across the UK.

Using the findings of this analysis, our Windrush communications and engagement strategy has been refreshed and a new programme of activities have been planned for the remainder of this calendar year and into early next year. At least another 23 events are being planned, in addition to those that we have already held, and there are plans for a regular strategic advisory group with key stakeholders to feed into our engagement and communications strategy. This
group was launched last month at a roundtable event hosted by the Home Secretary. At least six of the events planned to take place in the coming months will be held in partnership with a trusted community stakeholder. Paid local media and printed assets have been developed to advertise the engagement events. For example, the Luton event on 23 September was advertised in local papers and on Facebook. Funding has been introduced via gov.uk to reimburse community stakeholders who hold Windrush community events or surgeries on the Home Office’s behalf. A toolkit is also being developed to be placed on gov.uk for community and faith groups to use, and all existing material is being reviewed and updated. To reach people potentially affected who are overseas, we also continue to work closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to reach audiences globally.

As previously committed, the Department will be engaging an independent specialist to provide assurance that its entire outreach programme is effective at reaching potentially affected groups. We are currently setting the scope for the independent expert advice, which will include confirming the rationale, what they will be assessing and the timescales. This scope will include an emphasis on engaging with relevant stakeholders, including local authorities, to ensure that a broad range of insights into the affected communities are considered as part of the exercise. More broadly, I can confirm that the Home Office does frequently engage with local authorities in reaching out to affected individuals, including through the work of the Vulnerable Persons Team, and that the insights they provide are an important contributor to our work.

Yours sincerely,

Sir Philip Rutnam
Permanent Secretary